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Pepperdine University  
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

FOSTERING RESILIENCE: LEADER STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES FOR  
OVERCOMING ADVERSITY IN MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Eugene C. Coughlin

February, 2018

Farzin Madjidi, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to the men and women that have served our nation proudly in the United States Armed Forces.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the love and support that my family provided to me during this long journey. Thanks Monica. Thanks Kayleigh. Thanks Natalie. I love you all.

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to identify leadership strategies and practices for overcoming adversity in military organizations. This entailed determining what challenges military leaders face in implementing practices aimed at fostering resilience in their organizations. Also examined was how military leaders measure success at fostering resilience in their organizations. Finally, this study considered what recommendations military leaders would make to aspiring leaders wanting to foster resilience in their own organizations in the future. The researcher used a phenomenological approach that incorporated interviews and content analysis. The population for this study was United States Marine Corps infantry officers who commanded battalions in a war zone in Iraq or Afghanistan between 2003 and 2014. The results of this study suggest that the personal attributes that enable military leaders to overcome adversity during combat operations are: (1) educated and trained, (2) physically fit, and (3) believing in God. This study suggests that the foundational practices for overcoming adversity in military organizations are: (1) build cohesion in the organization by conducting small unit training, (2) create a positive command climate in the organization, and (3) instill a sense of purpose in the organization. This study suggests that the pre-deployment practices for fostering resilience in military organizations are: (1) demonstrate character to subordinates, (2) win the affection of subordinates, (3) design training for the organization that builds competence and confidence, (4) design realistic training for the organization that creates adversity, and (5) manage expectations about war. This study suggests that the deployment practices for overcoming adversity in military organizations are: (1) share in the danger with

subordinates, (2) be calm and confident on the battlefield, (3) focus on the mission, (4) do not second-guess decisions, (5) talk about the casualties and killing, (6) keep the unit moving after casualties and killing, (7) keep subordinates informed, and (8) empower small unit leadership.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

Overcoming adversity is a fundamental component of conducting combat operations. Writing in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Prussian Major-General Carl von Clausewitz identified danger and physical exertion as the constant sources of friction in war (Watts, 2004). Regarding the commander's responsibility to be resilient in the face of both danger and physical exertion, Clausewitz (1976) offered the following thoughts:

It is the impact of the ebbing of moral and physical strength, of the heart-rending spectacle of the dead and wounded, that the commander has to withstand - first in himself, and then in all those who, directly or indirectly, have entrusted him with their thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears. (p. 104)

Clausewitz goes on to say, "As each man's strength gives out, as it no longer responds to his will, the inertia of the whole gradually comes to rest on the commander's will alone" (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 104). Clausewitz concluded that military leaders and their subordinates could counter the negative effects of friction through both experience in combat and realistic training (Watts, 2004). Resilience is about coping with adversity. Britt, Sinclair, and McFadden (2013) defined resilience as "the demonstration of positive adaptation after exposure to significant adversity" (p. 4). Resilience can reduce incapacitating reactions to stress and provide the impetus to act in the face of threat (Hannah, 2012).

### **Background**

During combat operations, military personnel "face a wide range of traumatic or potentially traumatic events, including being shot at, knowing someone who has been injured or killed, seeing dead bodies or human remains, witnessing atrocities, and

seeing ill or injured civilians (including children)” (Britt, Sinclair et al., 2013, p. 4). The inability of service members to cope effectively with adversity during combat can negatively affect health, well-being, and both individual and organizational performance (Britt, Sinclair et al., 2013). The United States military has developed great interest in understanding the factors associated with resilience. A survey of 172 military leaders from 16 NATO and Partnership-for-Peace nations showed that most of those leaders considered themselves responsible for the psychological readiness of their personnel (Adler et al., 2008).

**Overcoming battlefield adversity.** Paul T. Bartone (2006), with the Industrial College of the Armed Forces at National Defense University, identified six causes of psychological stress in military operations. Like Clausewitz, Bartone (2006) pointed out that danger, the threat and real risk of death or serious bodily harm, is always present on the battlefield. Like the physical exertion that Clausewitz described as a source of friction, Bartone (2006) identified workload, or the long hours and days of combat deployments, as contributing to the adversity that soldiers must overcome. Soldiers and their leaders should also expect to experience isolation, ambiguity, powerlessness, and even boredom (Bartone, 2006).

The United States Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, conducted research to identify the intangible psychological constructs that are critical for soldier mission readiness (Aude, Bryson, Keller-Glaze, Nicely, & Vowels, 2014). Researchers at the institute first conducted a review of academic and military literature to identify the psychological constructs relevant to preparing soldiers for deployment. Next, the researchers interviewed soldiers that were conducting pre-

deployment tactical training at Fort Hood, Texas. Each interviewee rated the psychological constructs identified in the literature for criticality to readiness, effectiveness of current training, the need for new or improved training, and frequency of training needed (Aude et al., 2014).

One of the meta-constructs identified by this research was survivability. The study identified resilience (sometimes referred to as hardiness) as a sub-construct of survivability. According to Aude et al. (2014), resilience manifests behaviorally as “recovering quickly from setbacks, shock, injuries, adversity, and stress while maintaining a mission and organizational focus” (p. 47). The soldiers interviewed for this study stated that resilient behaviors require the highest frequency of training. Interestingly, those surveyed also believed that resilience is the least effectively trained behavior (Aude et al., 2014). Despite the opinions of the soldiers interviewed for this study, most military personnel do not develop severe mental health problems after exposure to traumatic events to include war (Sinclair, Waitsman, Oliver, & Deese, 2013).

**Resilience process.** Britt, Sinclair et al. (2013) developed an organizing framework for the study of military resiliency. Per their framework, after military personnel face a demanding event such as combat, they go through an appraisal and coping process. The factors that influence the appraisal and coping process can be personal, organizational, or both. This process results in the outcomes that military personnel experience from the demanding event.

Researchers with the Center for Military Health Policy Research at Rand Corporation (Meredith et al., 2011), conducted a critical review of psychology, sociology,



and medical literature to identify factors that promote military resilience. To identify the non-static, or changeable, factors associated with psychological resilience, the researchers coded 187 relevant documents published between 2000 and 2009. These researchers described resilience as “bouncing back, adapting, or returning to a baseline after experiencing adversity or trauma” (Meredith et al., 2011, p. 20). Their review of the literature also showed that resilience could involve growth after experiencing adversity or trauma.

Meredith et al. (2011) identified the *individual* factors that encourage resilience in the military as “positive coping, positive affect, positive thinking, realism, behavioral control, physical fitness, and altruism” (p. 16). They identified the unit or *organizational* factors that support resilience as “positive command climate, teamwork, and unit cohesion” (Meredith et al., 2011, p. 16). Britt and Oliver (2013) likewise argued that morale and unit cohesion enhance the resilience of military personnel. Morale helps service members cope with stressful and potentially traumatic military operations. Unit cohesion is a social construct that enables a military unit to work together towards accomplishing assigned missions (Britt & Oliver, 2013).

Bartone (2006) has argued that military leaders can influence how members of their units make sense of, interpret, and understand operational stress. According to Bartone (2006), the hierarchical structure of authority in the military gives leaders considerable control over their personnel. As a result, military leaders can have substantial sway over the meaning-making process in their organizations. For example, military leaders may “alter the manner in which their subordinates interpret and make sense of their experiences” through the “policies and priorities they establish, the

directives they give, the advice and counsel they offer, the stories they tell, and perhaps most important the examples they provide” (Bartone, 2006, p. S138). Bartone (2006) hypothesized that hardy (resilient) leaders could, by example, encourage their followers to have hardy (resilient) interpretations of stressful experiences. Sinclair and Britt (2013) also agreed that leader behaviors could influence the ability of military personnel to exhibit positive adaptation to significant adversity.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem with the current state of research into this phenomenon is two-fold. The first part of the problem concerns the study of the risk and protective factors that influence a service-members’ ability to be resilient. Lee et al. (2013) explored the psychological variables of resilience in data gathered from 33 studies conducted between 2001 and 2010. Their findings showed that resilience variables were comprised of both risk factors and protective factors. Risk factors included anxiety, depression, and perceived stress. Protective factors included optimism, social support, and self-efficacy (Lee et al., 2013). Protective factors showed the largest correlation with resilience. These results indicated that resilience improves more effectively by enhancing protective factors than reducing risk factors (Lee et al., 2013). However, according to Eisen et al. (2014), prior research conducted on the impact of stress and trauma on military personnel has concentrated mostly on identifying risk factors. Fewer studies have investigated the protective factors (Eisen et al., 2014).

The second part of the problem concerns the study of the personal and organizational factors that influence a service-member’s ability to be resilient. As discussed previously, both personal factors and organizational factors can influence the

coping and appraisal process that enables military personnel to overcome adversity (Britt, Sinclair et al., 2013). The main emphasis of prior research has been identifying individual traits that predict resilience (Jex, Kain, & Park, 2013). However, as Adler (2013) noted, resilience is mostly a group-level phenomenon in the military because team members rely on each other to work effectively in high-demand and high-threat environments. However, the U.S. Military has focused mostly on developing individual resilience in its personnel (Adler, 2013). This study seeks to address this problem by identifying factors, both protective and organizational, that influence a service-member's ability to be resilient.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Military leadership can impact the protective and organizational factors that influence a service-member's ability to be resilient. Examples of these factors include training, social support, and organizational culture (Jex et al., 2013). In preparation for combat, military leaders can and should seek to improve the resilience of the personnel under their command (Bartone, 2006; Sinclair & Britt, 2013). The purpose of this study was to identify leadership strategies and practices for fostering resilience in military organizations. This entailed determining what challenges military leaders face in implementing practices aimed at fostering resilience in their organizations. Also examined was how military leaders measure success at fostering resilience in their organizations. Finally, this study considered what recommendations military leaders would make to aspiring military leaders wanting to foster resilience in their organizations in the future.

## **Research Questions**

To discover how leader best practices and strategies foster resilience in a military organization, the questions posed were:

1. What current practices do military leaders employ to overcome adversity in their organizations?
2. What challenges do military leaders face in implementing those practices employed in overcoming adversity in their organizations?
3. How do military leaders measure their success at overcoming adversity in their organizations?
4. What recommendations would military leaders make to aspiring leaders wanting to overcome adversity in their organizations in the future?

## **Significance of the Study**

During the four years following the invasion of Afghanistan in September 2001, the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) evaluated 103,788 recently separated service members with tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan (Seal, Bertenthal, Miner, Sen, & Marmar, 2007). Of these veterans, 25% (25,658) received at least one mental health diagnosis such as anxiety disorder, depression, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or post-traumatic stress (Seal et al., 2007). Conversely, the remaining 75% (78,130) of the veterans did not present with mental health issues.

Similar findings are available in a study conducted by Bonanno et al. (2012). As part of the Millennium Cohort Study, these researchers investigated the trajectories of post-traumatic stress symptoms of service-members before and after deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. The Millennium Cohort Study started collecting health data in

2001 from U.S. military personnel in all branches of service to include active duty, reserve, and National Guard. The researchers looked at 3,393 service members who deployed once and 4,394 service members who deployed multiple times. Researchers surveyed self-reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress before and after deployment. They administered follow-up surveys three years later and again six years later. Bonanno et al. (2012) examined the data to determine longitudinal trajectories and found the following stable trajectories:

1. Low post-traumatic stress before and after deployment was 83.1% of personnel studied with a single deployment and 84.9% with multiple deployments.
2. Moderate to improving post-traumatic stress was 8.0% of personnel with a single deployment and 8.5% with multiple deployments.
3. Worsening to chronic post-traumatic stress was 6.7% for personnel with a single deployment and 4.5% with multiple deployments. As the researchers predicted, this group also experienced the most combat during their deployment(s).
4. High and stable post-traumatic stress was 2.2% for personnel with a single deployment.
5. High to improving posttraumatic stress was also 2.2% for personnel with multiple deployments.

These statistics suggest that only about 10% of service members that have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan are suffering from *high* or *chronic* post-traumatic stress. According to Hystad, Olsen, Espevik, and Säfvenbom (2015), most military personnel and their

leaders have successfully developed the ability to maintain effective functioning, despite the stress and pressure created by friction on the battlefield. Sinclair et al. (2013) have called for more research on why most service members do not develop mental health problems when exposed to stressors. This study answers that call. This study also answers calls for the study of leadership in the military context (Halpin, 2011) and the study of leadership in in-extremis or dangerous environments (Hannah, Campbell, & Matthews, 2010).

### **Assumptions of the Study**

Some would say that it is impossible to prove a negative. That is, it is impossible to prove how or why some military personnel do not suffer from combat related stress, or at least suffer less than others do, after enduring the same or similar experience of war. Thus, one may argue on those grounds that this research effort cannot prove that any leader strategy or practice was particularly effective at fostering resilience and enabling military personnel to overcome the adversity of combat.

However, this study assumes that after so many years of historical refinement, the military as an institution is adept at fostering resilience in its organizations. This study assumes that the behaviors of military leaders can influence the ability of military personnel to exhibit positive adaptation to significant adversity (Bartone, 2006; Jex et al., 2013; Sinclair & Britt, 2013). Indeed, this study assumes that one of the primary goals of military leadership is to build individual and collective resilience so that military units can fight and win on the battlefield.

## Limitations of the Study

All the data analyzed in this study is from participant interviews. This research study only examines the experiences of military officers that commanded battalions in a war zone between 2003 and 2014. It is possible that the participants' recollections of their experience will have lessened over time.

## Definition of Key Terms

- *Resilience* is the “positive psychological capacity to rebound, to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility” (Luthans, 2002b, p. 702).
- *Military resilience* is “the ability to maintain optimal performance during acute situations, positively recover afterward, and sustain combat motivation while meeting operational demands” (Boermans, Delahaij, Korteling, & Euwema, 2012, p. 315).
- *Hardiness* is a pathway to resilience (Bartone, 2006). Hardiness is characterized by (1) believing that one can control or influence events, (2) feeling committed or involved to the events of one’s life, and (3) viewing anticipated change as positive (Kobasa, 1979).
- *Positive psychology* is an “umbrella term used to stimulate and organize research, application, and scholarship on strengths, virtues, excellence, thriving, flourishing, resilience, flow, and optimal functioning in general” (Donaldson & Ko, 2010, p. 177).

- *Positive Organizational Scholarship* is “positive organizational characteristics that can enhance organizational survival and effectiveness in times of crises and adverse conditions” (Luthans & Youssef, 2004, p. 152).
- *Positive Organizational Behavior* is the “study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (Luthans, 2002a, p. 59).
- *Leadership in the Profession of Arms* is “the process of developing individual and collective human and organizational capacity and providing the purpose, direction, and motivation required to employ that capacity to create effective and ethical combat power under intense, dynamic, and dangerous conditions on behalf of the nation state being served” (Hannah, 2012, p. 14).
- *In-extremis leadership* is “giving purpose, motivation, and direction to people when there is imminent physical danger, and where followers believe that leader behavior will influence their physical well-being or survival” (Kolditz, 2006, p. 6).

### **Organization of the Study**

This research study examined how leader strategies and practices can foster resilience in a military organization. Using the metaphor of the blueprint, Grant and Osanloo (2014) explained that the application of theoretical and conceptual frameworks in a dissertation study is like building a home. Architects develop blueprints to guide construction of a house. In the same way that the architect designs the house, the



researcher uses critical thinking and planning to develop a blueprint for the dissertation (Grant & Osanloo, 2014).

**Theoretical framework.** Grant and Osanloo (2014) compared the theoretical framework of a dissertation with the elevation blueprint for a house. The theoretical framework “serves as the guide on which to build and support your study, and also provides the structure to define how you will philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically, and analytically approach the dissertation as a whole” (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 13). The theoretical framework used in this dissertation is social constructivism.

Rather than a social or educational theory, constructivism is a meta-theory of knowledge and learning (Ültanir, 2012). According to Creswell (2015), social constructivism seeks to understand the world that people live in through an examination of their experiences and what they mean. Research conducted using a social constructivist framework relies primarily on the views of study participants. From these views, the researcher inductively and deductively develops a pattern of meaning (Creswell, 2015).

**Conceptual framework.** Grant and Osanloo (2014) equated the conceptual framework of the dissertation to the floorplan blueprint for a house. The conceptual framework provides a structure to view related concepts and ideas (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). This research takes a positive psychology approach to uncovering successful leadership strategies for fostering resilience in a military organization.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) advocated for a psychology of positive human functioning. They predicted that psychologists, in order help individuals, families,

and communities thrive, would embrace positive human functioning to enable scientific understanding and the development of effective interventions. Positive psychology focuses on positive experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Luthans (2002b) later explained that positive psychology aims to “shift the emphasis away from what is wrong with people to what is right with people” (p. 697). Therefore, the intent of positive psychology is to “focus on strengths as opposed to weaknesses, to be interested in resilience as opposed to vulnerability, and to be concerned with enhancing and developing wellness, prosperity and the good life as opposed to the remediation of pathology” (Luthans, 2002b, p. 697).

## **Chapter 1 Summary**

This chapter introduced the concept of military resilience and presented the purpose for this research study. The primary purpose of this study is to identify leadership strategies and practices for overcoming adversity in military organizations. The four research questions developed for this study were listed in this chapter. The assumptions and limitations of this study were also discussed. Several key terms that are referenced in the study were defined. Chapter one also explained both the theoretical and conceptual approaches that are used in this study. The theoretical framework used in this dissertation is social constructivism. Conceptually, a positive psychology approach was taken to determine the leader strategies and practices that foster resilience in a military organization. A review of the relevant literature follows in the next chapter.

## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This chapter provides a review of the literature relevant to the purpose, research approach, and topic of this study. The review will address resilience theory, military resilience, military leadership, and positive psychology. The intent of this research effort is to add to the existing body of knowledge on military leadership and military resilience.

### Resilience Theory

The term resilience worked its way into the American lexicon soon after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (Newman, 2005). Focus groups conducted by the American Psychological Association (APA) found that many people throughout the country were experiencing both uncertainty and stress because of the attacks. In response, the APA launched an education campaign in August 2002 called the “The Road to Resilience.” According to Newman (2005), a key aspect of the program included psychologists providing information about resilience directly to their communities. The APA collaborated with Discovery Health Channel to coproduce and air a documentary entitled *Aftermath: The Road to Resilience*. This documentary showed that people could use resilience to cope with adversity and hardship (Newman, 2005).

**Hardiness.** Kobasa (1979) first described hardiness when she studied how personality moderated the onset of illness in two groups of public utility executives with comparably elevated levels of stress. Her research looked at how 86 executives with high stress remained healthy, as compared to 75 executives with high stress that exhibited illness. She hypothesized that high stress people stay healthier if they believe that they can control or influence their experiences, they feel involved or committed to

their lives, and they regard change as a positive challenge to their personal development (Kobasa, 1979, p. 3). Kobasa (1979) measured the control, commitment, and challenge dimensions of personality hardiness using separate scales. The results of her research showed that executives with elevated stress levels and low illness are hardier compared to executives with high levels of stress and illness (Kobasa, 1979).

Maddi (2002) argued that the combination of control, commitment, and challenge constitutes hardiness, and that any two of the three, without the third, does not. He explained that commitment was a predisposition to be involved rather than alienated. Control is about the struggle to have an influence on outcomes rather than being powerless. Challenge is learning constantly from experience instead of avoiding threats and uncertainties (Maddi, 2002).

Maddi (2004) also characterized hardiness as existential courage. According to Maddi, existential courage is about searching for meaning in one's life. Existential courage is choosing the future rather than the past. Each decision that a person makes involves choosing a future path that is unfamiliar and provokes developments versus repeating a previous familiar path. However, choosing the future instead of the past creates ontological anxiety through fear of uncertainty and the potential for failure. Consequently, choosing the future requires existential courage or hardiness (Maddi, 2004). According to Bartone (2006), hardiness is a pathway to resilience.

**Individual resilience.** Richardson (2002) concluded that “both resilience and resiliency are metatheories providing an umbrella for most psychological and educational theories” (p. 309). His foundational theory of resilience applies to individuals and groups such as families and communities. The resilience process begins at

biopsychospiritual homeostasis, which Richardson (2002) defined as “a point in time when one has adapted physically, mentally, and spiritually to a set of circumstances whether good or bad” (p. 310). Reintegration after disruption can take one of four paths. Ideally, a person will reintegrate resiliently. However, a person might simply return to their original state of biopsychospiritual homeostasis. Following adversity, people can reintegrate with some form of loss or even worse, they can reintegrate dysfunctionally (Richardson, 2002).

Richardson (2002) based his resiliency model on the three separate lines of inquiry that his research uncovered. Some of the resiliency literature described the internal and external protective factors or qualities that enable people to cope with adversity. The literature also explained resiliency as a coping process that leads to the growth of these protective factors or qualities following adversity. Lastly, the literature identified resiliency as a force that drives a person from survival to self-actualization. According to Richardson (2002), this force comes from “within the human spirit or collective unconscious of the individual” (p. 319).

Connor and Davidson (2003) defined resilience as “the personal qualities that enable one to thrive in the face of adversity” (p. 76). They created and validated the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) as a short 25-item self-rated measure to quantify resilience. Connor and Davidson (2003) based the content of their CD-RISC scale on the hardiness and resilience constructs developed by Kobasa (1979), Rutter (1985), and Lyons (1991). In addition, they included a spiritual component. They tested CD-RISC in both clinical and general population samples, finding the scale internally consistent and reliable (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

A study by Bonanno (2004) found that adults most often demonstrate a steady pattern of either recovery or resilience after exposure to loss, or potential trauma. He stated that recovery and resilience have separate outcome trajectories. Bonanno (2004) described recovery as initially experiencing moderate to severe disruptive psychological symptoms that decline gradually and then return to pre-trauma levels over several months. He characterized resilience as experiencing only mild disruption followed by a stable return to healthy functioning (Bonanno, 2004).

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) concluded that the two related processes of deliberative rumination and meaning-making may lead to post-traumatic growth. Rumination about the event that involves thinking about how and why the event occurred is accompanied by elevated levels of distress, at least initially, and characterized by intrusive thoughts, memories, and counter-factual thinking about how the incident could have been avoided. However, when an individual starts to derive meaning from the trauma by contemplating why it happened and what they can learn from the experience, they may experience positive life changes. The authors also argue that social support and self-disclosure to trusted and empathetic others may help the individual derive meaning from the event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Tedeschi and Kilmer (2005) stated that the transformative positive changes of posttraumatic growth:

1. Occur most distinctively in the aftermath of trauma rather than during lower level stress.
2. Appear to go beyond illusion.
3. Are experienced as an outcome rather than a coping mechanism.

4. Require a shattering of basic assumptions about one's life that traumas provide but lower level stress does not.

According to Rutter (2006), resilience might be the result of psychological coping processes or a "turning point" (p. 1) experience in a person's life. Rutter later described resilience as "essentially...an interactive concept that is concerned with the combination of serious risk experiences and a relatively positive psychological outcome despite those experiences" (p. 2). He explained that exposing a person to controlled risk, instead of avoiding risk, may improve resilience. He also posited that resilience might be the result of specific traits or circumstances (Rutter, 2006).

Mancini and Bonanno (2009) offered a model of resilience that highlighted the influence of individual differences on the appraisal processes and social support that lead to coping and resilience. Examples of these individual differences include personality, demographics, worldview, trauma exposure, social resources, economic resources, and positive emotions capacity. Mancini and Bonanno (2009) expressed doubts as to whether resilience-building interventions are effective, because the predictors of resilience are stable and therefore not easily changed. They argued that the idea of teaching resilience skills might "lead some people to overestimate their own coping ability or to underestimate the level of distress they might experience in response to a potential psychological hazard such as combat" (Bonanno, Westphal, & Mancini, 2011, p. 527).

Seery, Holman, and Silver (2010) hypothesized that exposure to some adversity would be more likely to promote resilience than exposure to either high adversity or no adversity. They developed the Lifetime Adversity Measure that reports the number of

times a person has ever experienced 37 different negative life events such as serious illness or injury, physical and sexual assault, death in the family, and exposure to natural disaster. During a two-year longitudinal assessment, 2,000 respondents completed the Lifetime Adversity Measure along with several other measures of well-being and mental health. Seery et al. (2010) reported that exposure to at least some prior adversity correlated to better well-being and mental health than did high lifetime adversity or no adversity. The results confirmed their hypothesis and suggested that exposure to some adversity can have benefits (Seery et al., 2010).

Seery (2011) later elaborated on the “steeling” effects of adversity described by Rutter (2006). According to Seery (2011), this steeling effect “parallels the development of physical fitness from aerobic exercise” (p. 390). Seery explained, “Just as the body requires exertion to improve fitness, there is no opportunity for toughness to develop if someone has never coped with stress; likewise, physical overexertion can be harmful, and too much stress disrupts toughening” (p. 390).

Seery, Leo, Lupien, Kondrak, and Almonte (2013) conducted a standardized laboratory pain experiment with healthy undergraduates. After completing the Lifetime Adversity Measure (Seery et al., 2010), study participants immersed one of their hands in ice-cold water and then reported the intensity of their pain. Following the painful experience, Seery et al. (2013) measured the participant’s negative cognitive processes. This experiment revealed that a history of at least some adversity related to lower negative emotions as compared to high lifetime adversity or no adversity (Seery et al., 2013).



According to Lee et al. (2013), there are two points of view regarding resilience. The first considers resilience as an individual trait that is fixed and stable. The second considers resilience as dynamic and changeable over time. In the latter case, adaptation derives from the interaction between individuals and their environment. According to Lee et al. (2013), a higher level of resilience accounts for both adaptive behaviors and physiologically and psychologically balanced growth.

Lee et al. (2013) explored the psychological variables of resilience in data gathered from 33 studies conducted between 2001 and 2010. Their findings showed that resilience variables were comprised of both risk factors and protective factors. Risk factors included anxiety, depression, and perceived stress. Protective factors included optimism, social support, and self-efficacy (Lee et al., 2013). Protective factors showed the largest correlation with resilience. Risk factors provided a medium effect. Self-efficacy was the most robust protective factor. Depression was the strongest risk factor. These results indicated that resilience improves more effectively by enhancing protective factors than reducing risk factors (Lee et al., 2013).

Cacioppo, Reis, and Zautra (2011) pointed out that most investigators regard resilience as an individual property. They say however, that social resilience is the capability for both individuals and groups to “foster, engage in, and sustain positive social relationships and to endure and recover from stressors and social isolation” (Cacioppo et al., 2011, p. 43). According to Cacioppo et al. (2011), social resilience transforms adversity into growth by making existing social engagements stronger and by creating new relationships. Social resilience is about the individual’s capacity to overcome adversity by working with other people. They identified the following nine

features of individuals and groups that promote social resilience (Cacioppo et al., 2011, p. 47):

1. Perceiving others accurately and empathically.
2. Feeling connected to other individuals and collectives.
3. Communicating caring and respect to others.
4. Perceiving others' regard for the self.
5. Having values that promote the welfare of self and others.
6. Responding in an appropriate way to social problems.
7. Expressing social emotions in an appropriate way.
8. Having trust.
9. Having tolerance.

**Organizational resilience.** Organizational resilience is new to management thinking (McAslan, 2010) and the concept of organizational resilience has remained mostly ambiguous and undefined (Burnard & Bhamra, 2011). Translating the concept of resilience into a working construct for organizations is complicated (McManus, Seville, Vargo, & Brunsdon, 2008). Lengnick-Hall (2005) found that the literature offers two differing perspectives on the meaning of organizational resilience. Some consider organizational resilience as only the ability to bounce back from an adverse situation. Others see organizational resilience as capitalizing on unexpected change and challenge by developing new capabilities to exploit future opportunities (Lengnick-Hall, 2005).

Friery (2012) noted that the concept of overcoming adversity through resilience is applicable to both individuals and organizations. According to Friery (2012), personal

resilience is a learned behavioral process that is amenable to training intervention. He posited that since gradual exposure to adversity enables individuals to develop coping skills, regular exposure to adversity for organizations via training interventions may enable the development of coping skills at the organizational level as well.

Lengnick-Hall et al. (2011) pointed out that organizations could develop competencies in core employees that support an organization's capacity for resilience. The aggregation of these competencies at the organizational level enables resilient responses to adversity. They defined organizational resilience as the "firm's ability to effectively absorb, develop situation-specific responses to, and ultimately engage in transformative activities to capitalize on disruptive surprises that potentially threaten organization survival" (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011, p. 248). According to them, the human resource management function is critical to the development of these strategic resources. They identified the employee contributions that support collective cognitive capacity in an organization as decisiveness, opportunism, expertise, and creativity (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011, p. 244).

Luthans, Vogelgesang, and Lester (2006) presented human resource strategies for developing resilience. They proposed hiring employees that exhibit resilience, and implementing programs that will increase the resiliency of existing employees. They argued that developing resilience in employees could make organizations more adaptive and successful over time (Luthans et al., 2006). Hystad et al. (2015) also claimed that if hardiness is a stable individual disposition, organizations could use recruitment and selection mechanisms to increase organizational resilience. Likewise, if

hardiness is flexible, then training and educational interventions could be important additional tools to enhancing hardiness in organizations (Hystad et al., 2015).

Vogus and Sutcliffe (2007) defined organizational resilience as “the maintenance of positive adjustment under challenging conditions such that the organization emerges from those conditions strengthened and more resourceful” (p. 3481). Challenging conditions can include ongoing risks, stresses, strains, errors, scandals, crises, shocks, and disruptions. According to Vogus and Sutcliffe (2007), resilient organizations operate “under the belief that they are imperfect but can become more perfect over time through learning from events and near events” (p. 3491). They stressed the importance of organizational learning as a means to developing resilience capabilities. In addition, they posited that resilient organizations might have structured processes that enable learning from a wider range of both successful and unsuccessful experiences (Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2007).

Gibson and Tarrant (2010) proposed a ‘principles model of resilience’ as the basis for the study of organizational resilience. Achieving organizational resilience requires an understanding of non-routine and disruption related risk. Their review of other conceptual models showed that resilience is an outcome that relies on a variety of organizational capabilities. The key principles of the Gibson and Tarrant (2010) resilience model include:

1. Resilience is not a process, management system, strategy, or predictive measurement. Resilience is an outcome.

2. Resilience is not a static trait. There is no metric or score that will describe resilience as a fixed feature. Resilience is dynamic and will increase or decrease as the context changes.
3. Resilience is not a single trait. Resilience arises from a complex interplay of many factors.
4. Resilience is multidimensional and there is currently no single model that describes resilience.
5. Resilience can exist over a range of conditions from low resilience (vulnerable) to high resilience (resilient).
6. Good risk management is the foundation of resilience (p. 7).

To develop organizational risk capacity, Gibson and Tarrant (2010) concluded that organizations must consider a variety of interdependent risk factors. They identified four strategic approaches for building organizational resilience: resistance, reliability, redundancy, and flexibility. Resistance strategies strengthen the organization to endure the immediate effects of adversity. Reliability strategies ensure that key functions, information, and resources remain available. Redundancy strategies provide alternate options for operational routines. Flexibility strategies seek to enhance decision-making, emergent leadership, trust, loyalty, and purpose through resiliency training and exercises (Gibson & Tarrant, 2010).

Burnard and Bhamra (2011) found that the mechanisms of organizational resilience can “improve an organization’s situational awareness, reduce organizational vulnerabilities to systemic risk environments, and restore efficacy following the events of a disruption” (p. 5587). They concluded that the detection and activation phases of a

resilient response are fundamental to an organization's positive adjustment following disruption. Situational awareness and an understanding of system vulnerabilities are key capabilities in the detection phase. The initiation of a response to the disruption is the key component of the activation phase. In addition to enabling an effective response to adversity, proactive detection and activation may create opportunities to grow because of a disruptive event (Burnard & Bhamra, 2011).

Mamouni Limnios, Mazzarol, Ghadouani, and Schilizzi (2014) pointed out that past research has usually characterized organizational resilience as a positive and desirable system characteristic. According to Mamouni Limnios et al. (2014), organizational resilience can manifest as either capacity for adaptive learning or resistance to change. Therefore, they argue that resilience can be an undesirable system characteristic, depending on the system state. In order to evolve, organizations must be willing to change. At the same time, organizations cannot make changes in response to every fluctuation in the operating environment. Accordingly, the strategic use of organizational resilience depends on whether, at the time of examination, resilience is a more or less desirable system characteristic (Mamouni Limnios et al., 2014).

McAslan (2010) stated that organizational resilience requires emphasis on adaptability, leadership, ethos, and values to stay committed to the organization's vision and purpose during times of crisis. General resilience is an organizational goal that does not replace the traditional risk management or continuity planning that provides specified resilience to ordinary and predictable threats. McAslan (2010) noted that since most organizations will never experience a major disruption, training exercises are the

best way to gain experience. McAslan (2010) commented on the “remarkable similarity between the enduring principles of resilience which the military require[s] of individuals and units, with the more general needs of organizational resilience” (p. 13). He explained that the military integrates intellectual, moral, and physical resources to build fighting power. The intellectual factor is the knowledge to fight and includes an understanding of the operational context. The moral factor is the will to fight and involves motivation, inspiration, and effective leadership. The physical factor is the means to fight and includes people, equipment, and collective capability (McAslan, 2010).

Ho, Teo, Bentley, Verreyne, and Galvin (2014) studied the organizational resilience literature utilizing content analysis software to determine implications for human resource management. Their results showed that the relevant literature characterizes organizational resilience as the organizational processes required to adapt and change environmental and competitive dynamics in support of strategic readiness. They concluded that organizational resilience is path-dependent and developed over time in expectation of the need. They found that employee training, development, recruitment, and selection influences organizational resilience by enabling the organization’s capability to prepare for and cope with significant change (Ho et al., 2014).

Hassall, Sanderson, and Cameron (2014) surveyed 310 industry practitioners from companies operating in a variety of industries both in Australia and abroad to obtain their perceptions of organizational resilience. They characterized organizational resilience as the ability of a system to adjust to change to manage disturbances and

exploit opportunities. They intended their results to guide the development of tools and models that will affect industry's ability to enhance its own resilience. They argued that organizational resilience is a useful concept only if industry understands it and considers it important. Furthermore, practitioners must be able to implement resilience within their organizations (Hassall et al., 2014).

Hassall et al. (2014) showed that most survey respondents considered building organizational resilience as important for their organization. Over 90% of the respondents indicated that building resilience was important for their company's survival. Only 2% of respondents considered organizational resilience to be of little or no importance. Just 26% of respondents considered themselves knowledge or very knowledgeable about organizational resilience. Most respondents believed that their organizations should do more to improve practitioner's knowledge of organizational resilience (Hassall et al., 2014).

Kay and Goldspink (2012) interviewed more than 50 Chief Executive Officers (CEO) from some of the largest critical and non-critical infrastructure organizations across Australia to develop a body of knowledge and research agenda on organizational resilience. According to Kay and Goldspink (2012), the CEO responses suggest that an organization's resilience capability matures over time. Initially, resilience enables the organization to conduct effective business as usual even during times of disruption. Later, the capability for resilience enables the organization to change and adapt in response to adversity. The resilient organization can shape its environment to either avoid or better respond to adversity. The CEOs viewed organizational resilience as mostly a cultural challenge. They also identified the critical role of trust in



organizational resilience. According to the CEOs, their company's human resource function is central to the development organizational resilience. They identified the use of scenarios, simulations, and training exercises as activities that support the development of resilience capability (Kay & Goldspink, 2012).

### **Military Resilience**

Boermans et al. (2012) defined military resilience as "the ability to maintain optimal performance during acute situations, positively recover afterward, and sustain combat motivation while meeting operational demands" (p. 315). According to Boermans et al. (2012), personal adaptation to adversity requires capacities that are internal, and resources that are external, to the individual. Positive psychological functioning, boosted by strengths of character, is an example of an internal capacity. An external resource could be the social facets of the military environment that encourage soldiers to overcome adversity. Boermans et al. (2012) claimed the military could develop resilience in their organizations by conducting interventions that strengthen both internal capacities and environmental resources.

Researchers with the Center for Military Health Policy Research at Rand Corporation (Meredith et al., 2011), conducted a critical review of psychology, sociology, and medical literature to identify factors that promote military resilience. To identify the non-static, or changeable, factors associated with psychological resilience, the researchers coded 187 relevant documents published between 2000 and 2009. These researchers described resilience as "bouncing back, adapting, or returning to a baseline after experiencing adversity or trauma" (Meredith et al., 2011, p. 20). Their review of the literature also showed that resilience could involve growth after experiencing adversity

or trauma (Meredith et al., 2011). A review of studies by Tedeschi and McNally (2011) also shows that combat veterans who report post-traumatic growth over time may be becoming more resilient.

Meredith et al. (2011) identified the individual factors that encourage resilience in the military as “positive coping, positive affect, positive thinking, realism, behavioral control, physical fitness, and altruism” (p. 16). They identified the unit or organizational factors that support resilience as “positive command climate, teamwork, and unit cohesion” (Meredith et al., 2011, p. 16). Britt and Oliver (2013) likewise argued that morale and unit cohesion enhance the resilience of military personnel. Morale helps service members cope with stressful and potentially traumatic military operations. Unit cohesion is a social construct that enables a military unit to work together towards accomplishing assigned missions (Britt & Oliver, 2013).

The U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, conducted research to identify the intangible psychological constructs that are critical for soldier mission readiness (Aude et al., 2014). Researchers at the institute first conducted a review of academic and military literature to identify the psychological constructs relevant to preparing soldiers for deployment. Next, the researchers interviewed 56 soldiers that were conducting pre-deployment tactical training at Fort Hood, Texas. Each interviewee rated the psychological constructs identified in the literature for criticality to readiness, effectiveness of current training, the need for new or improved training, and frequency of training needed (Aude et al., 2014).

One of the meta-constructs identified by this research was survivability. The study identified resilience (sometimes referred to as hardiness) as a sub-construct of

survivability. According to Aude et al. (2014), resilience manifests behaviorally as “recovering quickly from setbacks, shock, injuries, adversity, and stress while maintaining a mission and organizational focus” (p. 47). The soldiers interviewed for this study stated that resilient behaviors require the highest frequency of training. Interestingly, those surveyed also believed that resilience is the least effectively trained behavior (Aude et al., 2014).

Britt, Sinclair et al. (2013) developed an organizing framework for the study of military resiliency. Per their framework, after military personnel face a demanding event such as combat, they go through an appraisal and coping process (Britt, Sinclair et al., 2013). The factors that influence the appraisal and coping process can be personal, organizational, or both. This process results in the outcomes that military personnel experience from the demanding event (Britt, Sinclair et al., 2013).

**Cohesion and morale.** According to Siebold (2007), military group cohesion is about social integration within four relationship structures: peer (horizontal), leader (vertical), organizational, and institutional bonding. Peer bonding is among members of a military unit at the same hierarchical level such as a squad, platoon, or company. Leader bonding is between seniors and subordinates at the unit level. Together, peer and leader bonding compose primary group cohesion. Primary group cohesion is about trust among group members and the capacity for teamwork. Primary group cohesion is the result of direct personal interactions and is a predictor of performance. Primary group cohesion creates the willingness to follow leaders into combat and fight alongside peers (Siebold, 2007).

Siebold (2007) also explained that military cohesion includes the integration of service members into larger secondary organizations. Organizational bonding is between the service member and the larger organizations to which they belong. For example, members of a squad should also feel a sense of belonging to the platoon and company that they are a part of. Institutional bonding is between service members and their branch of service (i.e., Army, Navy, Air Force, or Marines). Organizational and institutional bonding compose secondary group cohesion. Secondary group cohesion is also about the perceived trustworthiness of the organization or institution that the service member belongs to. Secondary group cohesion creates professional service members. Secondary group cohesion is a predictor of discipline and attitudes towards military service (Siebold, 2007).

King (2006) has argued that the process of combat training is what decisively binds military groups together. He stated that collective training drills are both critical to building soldier relationships and “decisive in creating social cohesion in combat” (King, 2006, p. 509). King (2006) goes on to say, “No matter how familiar soldiers are with each other on a personal and informal basis, if they do not recognize what collective military practices these symbols imply, the soldiers will lack social cohesion; they will be militarily ineffective” (p. 510).

Britt, Dickinson, Moore, Castro, and Adler (2007) defined morale as motivation and enthusiasm to perform well. Their longitudinal study of 1,685 U.S. soldiers on a peacekeeping mission to Kosovo showed that engagement in meaningful work and confidence in unit leadership and functioning are predictors of morale. They also

concluded that morale also enables better adjustment under stressful circumstances (Britt et al., 2007).

Britt, Adler, Bliese, and Moore (2013) assessed whether higher levels of morale would associate with lower levels of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for soldiers who recently returned from a combat deployment. Study participants that reported higher levels of morale were less likely to report PTSD symptoms. The results of their study also indicated that morale could mediate the negative psychological consequences of combat (Britt, Adler et al., 2013).

**Resilience as a predictor of success.** Escolas, Pitts, Safer, and Bartone (2013) examined the effects of military time-in-service on self-reported PTSD in U.S. military personnel and the potential for hardiness to moderate this relationship. The researchers collected data using anonymous questionnaires of 561 post-deployment military personnel stationed at Fort Sam Houston and Lackland Air Force Base from the summer of 2010 to the summer of 2011. They measured hardiness using the Dispositional Resiliency Scale. They assessed PTSD symptoms using a separate self-report. The results of their study showed that hardiness related negatively to PTSD symptoms. Military time-in-service related positively to PTSD. However, military time-in-service had no effect on service members that scored high for hardiness. According to Escolas et al. (2013), hardiness could be a protective factor for those that serve longer in the military.

Hystad, Eid, Laberg, and Bartone (2011) examined the role of hardiness as a predictor of admission into military officer schools in Norway. A total of 1,111 officer applicants completed the Norwegian version of the Dispositional Resilience Scale at the

beginning of a three-week selection process in the summer of 2009. Using independent sample *t*-tests, the researchers compared the hardiness scores of the 569 admitted applicants to the scores of the 542 applicants not admitted. Their results showed that the successful applicants scored significantly higher in hardiness (Hystad et al., 2011).

Bartone, Kelly, and Matthews (2013) evaluated hardiness as a predictor of leadership and adaptability for 145 first year cadets at West Point during 2001 and 2002. The researchers surveyed the cadets when they first entered the school and then again three years after graduation from the four-year program. They measured the cadet's resilience using the Dispositional Resilience Scale. The researchers retrieved the cadet's leadership potential scores from their admissions records. The researchers constructed a separate scale to measure adaptability. Hierarchical regression analyses showed that hardiness predicted both leader performance while in school at West Point and leader adaptability in the Army after graduation (Bartone et al., 2013).

Skomorovsky and Stevens (2013) assessed data collected from 200 Canadian Forces candidates during basic training to test the resilience characteristics of hardiness and coping. The results of their study suggest that neuroticism, military hardiness, and problem-focused coping are important concepts that explain the variance in resilience among military personnel. According to the researchers, recruiting potential military personnel with lower neuroticism would be beneficial. In addition, resilience training for new recruits that incorporates hardiness and coping components may also be beneficial (Skomorovsky & Stevens, 2013).

Johnsen et al. (2013) investigated whether hardiness predicted successful completion of a 250-km, nine-day, Arctic ski march by 178 Norwegian soldiers. The ski

march was the final event in the selection process for soldiers that protect the border between Norway and Russia. The researchers hypothesized that the hardiness facets of commitment, control, and challenge would predict successful completion of the ski march. To measure hardiness, this study used a revised 15-item Dispositional Resilience Scale. Hierarchical regression analysis showed that total hardiness scores predicted successful completion of the ski march, even after controlling for nutrition, physical fitness, and sensation seeking factors. A second hierarchical regression found that the commitment facet of hardiness was the most significant predictor of success in the ski march (Johnsen et al., 2013).

Bartone, Roland, Picano, and Williams (2008) found that psychological hardiness contributes significantly to the successful completion of U.S. Army Special Forces candidate school. Using the short form of the Dispositional Resilience Scale, the researchers assessed 1,138 candidates at the start of the course. Bartone et al. (2008) calculated the resilience scores and evaluated them as a predictor of success or failure at the school. Confirming their hypothesis, independent sample t-tests and regression analyses indicated that the 637 course graduates were significantly higher in hardiness than the 501 nongraduates (Bartone et al., 2008).

**Resilience and mental health.** Taylor, Pietrobon, Taverniers, Leon, and Fern (2013) examined the association of hardiness to both mental health and physical health in two samples ( $N = 65$ ,  $N = 55$ ) of male Navy and Marine Corps personnel. The researchers predicted that mental health would mediate the association of hardiness with physical health. They measured hardiness using the Dispositional Resilience Scale-15. They examined the associations between hardiness, mental health, and

physical health using regression-based mediation analyses followed by a test of indirect effects. An initial model showed that hardiness predicted physical health in the total sample. However, when the researchers added mental health to the model, the influence of physical health was no longer significant. A test of significance suggested a mediated effect. They observed similar patterns in each individual sample (Taylor et al., 2013).

Bartone (1999) explored the potential for hardiness to mediate stress in a group of six Army National Guard and Army Reserve medical units that mobilized for deployment to the Gulf War. Three of the units deployed to the Persian Gulf. One unit went to Germany, and two units remained in the United States. During May through June 1992, Bartone (1999) collected self-report, voluntary questionnaires measuring stress, hardiness, and negative health symptoms. His study suggests that closeness to the war zone associates with higher stress levels and negative health outcomes. As expected, the medical unit that deployed to the Persian Gulf reported the highest levels of stress. The unit that remained in the United States reported the lowest levels. The unit that deployed to Germany reported the next highest levels of stress. Regression modelling showed that the low-hardiness group reported more negative health outcomes than the high-hardiness group (Bartone, 1999).

Dolan and Adler (2006) investigated the relationships between deployment stressors, health outcomes, and depressive symptoms as reported by 629 soldiers during a six-month peacekeeping deployment to Kosovo. The researchers collected deployment stressors data three to four months into the deployment. Data collection of health outcomes occurred one to two months after the soldiers returned to their home



base in Germany. Dolan and Adler (2006) hypothesized that hardiness would correlate with psychological and physical health both during and after the deployment. They also expected hardiness to moderate the effects of deployment stressors on psychological and physical health after the deployment. The researchers developed the 18-item Military Hardiness Scale to measure the hardiness components of commitment, control, and challenge in this study. Commitment was associated with strong military identity and commitment to accomplishing the mission. Control was associated with personal influence on mission outcomes and job control. Challenge was associated with the exertion of personal resources in support of deployment demands (Dolan & Adler, 2006). The results of their study showed that hardiness correlated with psychological health during and after deployment (Dolan & Adler, 2006). Soldiers with higher hardiness scores reported lower depression levels. Contrary to the researchers' hypothesis however, hardiness did not correlate with physical health either during or after deployment (Dolan & Adler, 2006).

Orme and Kehoe (2014) tested whether cognitive hardiness moderated the adverse effects of deployment-related stressors on the health of 448 Australian Army Reservists deployed on peacekeeping operations in Timor-Leste or the Solomon Islands. The researchers surveyed the peacekeepers at the start, end, and up to 24 months after returning from a four to seven-month deployment. The results of their study showed that hardiness, as measured by the Cognitive Hardiness Scale, moderated the relationship between non-traumatic stress, trauma exposure, and a composite measure of psychological distress. Hardiness did not moderate the relationship to poor physical health (Orme & Kehoe, 2014).

Pietrzak, Johnson, Goldstein, Malley, and Southwick (2009) examined whether psychological resilience and social support protected against traumatic stress and depressive symptoms in Iraq and Afghanistan veterans returning to Connecticut. The purpose of their research was to develop recommendations for Connecticut's public policy makers for improving the readjustment of veterans back into civilian life. Pietrzak et al. (2009) surveyed 272 veterans that served in Iraq or Afghanistan between January 2003 and March 2007 for resilience, social support, stress, and depressive symptoms. They measured resilience using the CD-RISC. Their hierarchical regression analysis suggested that resilience and social support after deployment associated negatively with traumatic stress and depressive symptoms (Pietrzak et al., 2009). Veterans reporting stress and depressive symptoms reported more than one full standard deviation lower levels of resilience and post-deployment social support than did veterans not reporting stress and depressive symptoms. According to Pietrzak et al. (2009), these results suggest that interventions aimed at improving resilience and social support may reduce the impact of adversity and trauma.

Schok, Kleber, and Lensvelt-Mulders (2010) examined whether resilience was associated with the processing of war-zone experiences or if resilience protected against post-traumatic stress reactions. They collected survey data from a sample of 1,561 Dutch veterans who deployed for an average of 18 months during combat and peacekeeping operations since 1945. Using structural equation modelling, their results showed that the resilience variables of self-esteem, optimism, and control predicted lower perceptions of war-zone stressors as threatening. Higher self-esteem, control,

and optimism correlated with more growth gained from a military deployment (Schok et al., 2010).

Eisen et al. (2014) examined the intrinsic resilience variables of hardiness and self-efficacy, and the extrinsic resilience variable of social support, as factors that could prevent mental health problems and the abuse of alcohol and drugs in U.S. military personnel returning from deployments to Afghanistan and Iraq. The researchers surveyed a random sample of 2,000 recently returned military personnel from the Defense Manpower Data Center. The sample included 50% active duty, 25% National Guard, and 25% reserve personnel from across the military services. The sample included an equal number of men and women. Of those service members contacted, 512 of them completed surveys between 3 and 12 months after returning deployment during 2008-2009 and again another 6 to 12 months later. The researchers used regression analyses to establish whether resilience measured shortly after deployment predicted later mental health and substance problems. They used the Deployment Risk and Resilience Inventory, the 15-item Dispositional Resilience Scale, and separate instruments to measure mental health and alcohol or drug use. The results of their study showed that greater hardiness predicted better mental health and lower levels of substance abuse 6-12 months later. However, hardiness did not predict subsequent post-traumatic stress symptom severity. Some aspects of resilience seem to protect service members from the negative effects of traumatic exposure. These findings suggested that interventions aimed at promoting and sustaining resilience after deployment might have the potential to improve the mental health of veterans (Eisen et al., 2014).

Bonanno et al. (2012), using data from the Millennium Cohort Study of service members, investigated the trajectories of post-traumatic stress symptoms before and after deployment. The Millennium Cohort Study started collecting health data in 2001 from U.S. military personnel in all branches of service to include active duty, reserve, and National Guard. The researchers looked at 3,393 service members who deployed once and 4,394 service members who deployed multiple times. Researchers surveyed self-reported symptoms of post-traumatic stress before and after deployments to Iraq or Afghanistan. They administered follow-up surveys three years later and again six years later. Bonanno et al. (2012) examined the data to determine longitudinal trajectories. Their results showed comparable trajectories for personnel deploying once or multiple times. The researchers found the following stable trajectories.

- Low post-traumatic stress before and after deployment was 83.1% of personnel studied with a single deployment and 84.9% with multiple deployments.
- Moderate to improving post-traumatic stress was 8.0% of personnel with a single deployment and 8.5% with multiple deployments.
- Worsening to chronic post-traumatic stress was 6.7% for personnel with a single deployment and 4.5% with multiple deployments. As the researchers predicted, this group also experienced the most combat during their deployment(s).
- High and stable post-traumatic stress was 2.2% for personnel with a single deployment.

- High to improving posttraumatic stress was also 2.2% for personnel with multiple deployments.

**Consolidated Soldier Fitness (CSF) program.** The Army approached Martin E.P. Seligman, from the University of Pennsylvania, in August 2008 to discuss the problems of soldiers returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Seligman and Fowler, 2011). According to Casey (2011), the rates of suicide and posttraumatic stress in the Army were high due to the strain of nearly a decade of protracted war. Seligman met with U.S. Army Chief of Staff, General George W. Casey, and his advisers in the Pentagon later that year (Seligman & Fowler, 2011).

Seligman explained that the human response to high adversity is normally distributed (Seligman & Fowler, 2011). On the left of the distribution are the minority who exhibit maladaptive responses to include PTSD, depression, or anxiety. The center of the distribution includes most people who are resilient and after a brief disruption, return to a normal level of functioning. On the right side of the distribution are the people who grow after adversity by attaining a higher level of functioning. Seligman suggested that the aim of any prevention program developed by the Army should be to move the distribution to the right by lowering maladaptive responses and increasing resilience and posttraumatic growth (Seligman & Fowler, 2011).

With help from Seligman, the Army subsequently developed the CSF program to enhance the psychological resilience of soldiers, their family members, and Department of the Army civilians (Seligman & Fowler, 2011). CSF develops psychological resilience in the physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and family dimensions (Casey, 2011). The CSF program is a “strengths-based” resiliency program that moves beyond a treatment-

centric approach and focuses on prevention by enhancing the already present psychological strengths of soldiers (Casey, 2011). According to Casey (2011), he envisioned a “culture in which psychological fitness is recognized as every bit as important as physical fitness” (p. 2).

Cornum, Matthews, and Seligman (2011) described the CSF program as historically unique in a large organization with over one million people. They pointed out that the CSF program proactively improves resilience rather than waiting to see who might have a negative outcome following stress. They argued that the program might provide a model for implementing similar interventions in other very large organizations. The four elements of the CSF program are:

1. Online self-assessment of emotional, social, family, and spiritual fitness using the Global Assessment Tool (GAT).
2. Online learning modules individualized from GAT results to improve fitness in these domains.
3. Formal resilience training at every Army leader development school.
4. Training of Army master resilience trainers (MRTs) to design training plans and conduct training at the unit level (Cornum et al., 2011, p. 6).

According to Peterson, Park, and Castro (2011), the CSF program,

...aims to measure the psychosocial strengths and assets of soldiers as well as their problems, to identify those in need of basic training in a given domain as well as those who would benefit from advanced training, and then to provide that training. (p. 10)

Peterson et al. (2011) described program assessment using the online GAT as the “linchpin” of the CSF program (p. 10). The GAT is a self-report 105-item survey that measures psychosocial fitness in the emotional, social, family, and spiritual domains. The lead developer of the GAT was Chris Peterson at the University of Michigan (Lester, Harms, Herian, & Sowden, 2015). Nansook Park, also from the University of Michigan, and Army Colonel Carl A. Castro of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command contributed to the development of the GAT as well (Lester et al., 2015). Peterson et al. (2011) described the four original domains of psychosocial fitness as follows:

1. Emotional fitness reflects freedom from depression, positive mood, life satisfaction, optimism, character strengths, active coping styles, and personal resilience.
2. Social fitness indicates feelings about the Army, the soldier’s unit, and colleagues. It is a measure of trust in colleagues and leaders and overall moral.
3. Family fitness refers to how the soldier is faring in personal and familial relationships.
4. Spiritual fitness reflects whether the soldier has a sense of meaning, purpose, and accomplishment in life that extends beyond the self. (p. 13)

Regarding spiritual fitness, Peterson et al. (2011) noted that it was important to measure a soldier’s meaning and purpose without reference to any basis in specific religious beliefs and practices. The Army did not base the spiritual fitness component of the CSF

program on any specific idea of philosophical, nonreligious, or religious belief or practice (Pargament & Sweeney, 2011).

The Army released GAT 2.0 in 2014. The latest version of GAT reflects that the CSF program has expanded beyond psychosocial functioning to include physical health. The GAT now includes questions about sleep patterns, nutrition, risk-taking behaviors, and substance use (Lester et al., 2015). Peterson et al. (2011) explained that the Army uses the GAT to assess soldiers, provide immediate feedback about his or her profile of strengths, and then direct them into an individualized online training program. The Army also uses GAT to evaluate the success of the CSF program and to gauge the psychosocial fitness of the entire Army. All soldiers currently not deployed to combat operation complete the GAT annually. Requiring every soldier to take the GAT reduces the stigma typically associated with mental health surveys (Peterson et al., 2011). According to Lester, McBride, and Cornum (2013), only the U.S. Army Chief of Staff may direct the release of soldier's GAT score to anyone other than the soldier who completed the GAT. This policy has prevented officials from obtaining GAT scores for criminal and suicide investigations (Lester et al., 2013).

Lester et al. (2015) found that soldiers who attained Ranger status have high GAT scores and soldiers with behavioral problems generally evidence low GAT scores. On this basis, they suggested that the Army could use GAT scores as a means for selecting personnel for challenging military assignments (Lester et al., 2015). Peterson et al. (2011) posited that once validated, the GAT might have value in gauging overall unit-level effectiveness and assignments. However, according to Lester, McBride, and Cornum (2013), the Army has never used GAT as a surveillance tool despite repeated



requests from commanders. Army policy does not allow for command access to individual or unit-level GAT scores because data analyses suggests a wide distribution of scores within units and few if any reliable differences between large organizations (Lester et al., 2013).

Reivich, Seligman, and McBride (2011) described the development of the 10-day Master Resilience Trainer (MRT) course. The University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Center developed the preparation component of MRT. Researchers at the center, led by Seligman, previously developed the Penn Resilience Program (PRP). That program was successful in preventing depression and anxiety in young people. According to Reivich et al. (2011), the skills taught at PRP are applicable to an adult military population. Because of the ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, Army leadership accepted empirical evidence supporting the efficacy of the PRP instead of waiting to conduct pilot testing on the MRT course (Lester et al., 2013). Researchers at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research developed the sustainment component that focuses on deployment cycle training (Reivich et al., 2011). Sports psychologists at the United States Military Academy at West Point developed the enhancement component that teaches personal and professional skills. The MRT course is a "train-the-trainer" for enlisted leaders that enables dissemination of MRT concepts throughout the Army (Reivich et al., 2011).

A report prepared for the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command measured both resilience and growth in terms of actual trajectories of psychological functioning over time (Park & Peterson, 2014). Soldiers in the 4th Infantry Division completed surveys before (February 2008), during (July 2008), immediately after (May

2009), and long after (2011–2013) their deployment to Iraq. The study assessed a comprehensive set of healthy and unhealthy psychosocial characteristics. The study also assessed the impact of potentially traumatic events such as threats to one's own life, injuries, loss of comrades in combat, degree of combat exposure, and marital problems (Park, 2014). The findings from this data showed:

1. Soldiers frequently experienced adverse events during deployment.
2. Soldiers' mental health decreased on average during deployment.
3. Soldiers on average had similar levels of psychological wellbeing after deployment as before deployment.
4. The most important contributor to soldier well-being after deployment was well-being before deployment.
5. The factors that predicted well-being following deployment included those emphasized in the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (CSF) Program (Park, 2014, p. 5).

Lester et al. (2013) reported results collected by an Army program evaluation team that also seemed to confirm the effectiveness of the CSF program. According to Lester et al. (2013), impartial evaluators not associated with the development of the CSF program, assessed soldiers from multiple Brigade Combat Teams, 75% of which deployed to combat during the evaluation period. The evaluation team assessed soldiers at three times over a period of 15 months using the GAT. According to their findings, even after controlling for unit cohesion and leadership, MRT training in operational army units does lead to an increase in the positive psychological states and

a decrease in negative psychological states as measured by the GAT across time (Lester et al., 2013).

Carr et al. (2013) conducted the first-ever assessment of MRT training implementation in a deployment setting. Each researcher, except for Eonta, were military service members conducting this work as part of their official duties. According to Carr et al. (2013), an Army unit that deployed to a detention facility in Afghanistan received structured weekly resiliency training over a 12-week period in 2010. An MRT certified instructor provided the training. Both the Army unit and the researchers expected the implementation of MRT to be more effective since it was proximal in both time and space to exposure to deployment related stressors. According to Carr et al. (2013), the objective of their assessment was to explore opportunities to improve the MRT component of the CSF program. They collected self-report data before and after the 12 weeks of training using the CD-RISC. The researchers also collected separate measures of stress, morale, and performance. Their results showed that the MRT resilience training resulted in no measurable change in cognition as measured by CD-RISC (Carr et al., 2013).

### **Military Leadership**

Military contexts impose unique contingencies, constraints, and causations on leadership processes (Hannah, 2012). Stanley M. Halpin (2011), with the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, noted that many reviews of leadership research are now calling for the study of leadership within its organizational context. Admonitions to study leadership in context is particularly relevant to the

challenges and complexities of the military environment (Halpin, 2011). Hannah (2012) described leadership in the profession of arms as,

...the process of developing individual and collective human and organizational capacity and providing the purpose, direction, and motivation required to employ that capacity to create effective and ethical combat power under intense, dynamic, and dangerous conditions on behalf of the nation state being served.  
(p. 14)

**The profession of arms.** In *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (2013), it states that military personnel, especially officers, must understand military theory and philosophy, know military history, and appreciate the great responsibility of their office (p. B1). Military professionals are students in the art and science of war, and they proudly refer to their calling as the Profession of Arms. Don Snider (2012), of the U.S. Army War College, pointed out that professions produce expert work that is unique to their field of endeavor, after years of practice and study. According to Snider (2012), “A deep moral obligation rests on the profession, and its professionals, to continuously develop expertise and use that expertise only in the best interests of society—professionals are actually servants” (p. 6).

Intrinsic factors such as lifelong pursuit of expert knowledge and the privilege and honor of service motivate professionals (Snider, 2012). General Martin Dempsey (2012), a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, recently reminded military personnel that they “qualify as professionals through intensive training, education, and practical experience” (p. 4). To “maintain the best led and best trained force in the world,” Dempsey called on military professionals to renew their commitment to the

Profession of Arms (2012, p. 3). He stated that the values of “duty, honor, courage, integrity, and selfless service” are the “moral and ethical fabric” (Dempsey, 2012, p. 3) of the military profession. According to Dempsey (2012), military leaders are the “foundation and driving force” that provide “incalculable competitive advantage against our adversaries” (p. 4).

The distinguishing characteristics of the military profession are its capability to use lethal force, and the readiness of those in uniform to die in the service of their country (Dempsey, 2012, p. 4). Military service demands the acceptance of this unlimited liability (*The Armed Forces Officer*, 2006, p. 94). In 1962, General Sir John Hackett of the British Army was the first to use the term unlimited liability in a military context (Mileham, 2010). In his seminal book, *The Profession of Arms*, Hackett (1983) declared, “The essential basis of the military life is the ordered application of force under an unlimited liability” (p. 202).

**Combat leadership.** Hannah, Campbell, and Matthews (2010) have called for more research on leadership when confronting dangerous contexts. Thomas A. Kolditz (2005), from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, noted that in dangerous contexts, followers demand that their leaders are competent. Military rank and authority alone are not likely to garner respect, or obedience to orders, in the combat environment (Kolditz, 2005).

Kolditz (2005) described in-extremis leadership as “giving purpose, motivation, and direction to people when there is imminent physical danger, and where followers believe that leader behavior will influence their physical well-being or survival” (p. 6). According to Kolditz (2005), in-extremis leaders are inherently motivated and oriented

towards learning. They are willing to share risks with their subordinates and strive to develop trust in their organizations. In-extremis leaders are situationally aware and learn quickly. They are authentic, lack materialism, and focus on values (Kolditz, 2005).

Hannah, Uhl-Bien, Avolio, and Cavarretta (2009) categorized three specific types of in-extremis organizations: high-reliability organizations, trauma organizations, and critical action organizations. All three are applicable to the military. High-reliability organizations employ systems to execute repetitive tasks with few errors and they focus on risk prevention. Most military units would be in the category. Trauma organizations often operate in extreme situations and they adhere to strict procedures and protocols. Military field hospitals are an example of trauma organizations (Hannah et al., 2009). Critical action organizations directly confront danger with the understanding that there will be significant risk to members of the organization. Critical action organizations are willing to accept casualties to accomplish their missions (Hannah et al., 2009). Army and Marine Corps infantry units that train for, and participate in, direct combat are examples of critical action organizations.

Hannah, Campbell, and Matthews (2010) argued that ethos is fundamentally important to organizations that operate in a dangerous or in-extremis context. They pointed out that military organizations typically codify their ethos in writing. The U.S. Marine Corps' "Rifleman's Creed" and the U.S. Army's "Warrior's Ethos" are examples. They also noted that ethos in practice is more encompassing than these explicit statements of commitment. According to Hannah, Campbell et al. (2010), ethos comprises "the essence of what it is to be an exemplar member" of the military profession (p. 180).

Hannah (2012) concluded that moral identity sustains ethical behavior in military personnel. Snider, Oh, and Toner (2009) submitted that the Army's professional military ethic is a shared system of beliefs and norms, both legal and moral, which define the Army's commitment to serve the nation. Jennings and Hannah (2011) noted that a "fundamental tension in military ethics" is about going well past just averting unethical behavior to inspiring "supererogatory conduct above and beyond the call of duty" (p. 550). They identified obligation and aspiration as two contrasting, but complementary, moralities in the military. According to them, military service motivates personnel to both follow rules and develop identity.

Jennings and Hannah (2011) suggested that the baseline for a military ethic should be a motivation to follow rules based on an accepted moral obligation. However, they proposed that an effective military ethic must also "inform and motivate identity-conferring conduct based on a morality of aspiration" (Jennings & Hannah, 2011, p. 561). Intrinsic motivation, self-challenge, and self-efficacy are representative of identity conferring behavior. The morality of aspiration is about achieving the full realization of martial virtue. Martial virtue includes such ideals as honor, courage, commitment, and sacrifice (Jennings & Hannah, 2011).

Through inductive investigation, Fisher, Hutchings, and Sarros (2010) studied the in-extremis leadership exhibited by military advisors from Australia during their service in the Vietnam War. They determined that the most significant component of effective in-extremis leadership is trust. The researchers also found that trust is conditional and that it is possible to develop trust quickly in the in-extremis environment (Fisher et al., 2010). Sweeney, Thompson, and Blanton (2009) studied trust and influence in combat.

They surveyed 320 U.S. Army soldiers in Iraq during combat operations. Their findings showed that followers who trust their leaders are more willing to accept the influence of those leaders. Followers consider leaders dependable if the leader has good character traits, establishes interdependent relationships, and displays the required knowledge and skills associated with their leadership position (Sweeney et al., 2009).

**Strategic, operational, and tactical leadership.** Wong, Bliese, and McGurk (2003) reviewed military leadership literature to identify research needs and opportunities for military leadership scholars. Using the Hunt (1991) model of leadership, they organized the critical leader tasks and individual capabilities required into a hierarchy at the systems, organizational, and direct levels of leadership. The Hunt model recognizes that systems leadership relates to the 10- to 20-year timespan and longer. Organizational leadership relates to the two- to 10-year timespan. Direct leadership relates to the present to two-year timespan (Wong et al., 2003).

Wong et al. (2003) found that Hunt's three-level model of leadership correlated to the military's stratification of war at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. In *Doctrine of the Armed Forces of the United States* (2013), the writers explain that conceptualizing warfare at three levels—strategic, operational, and tactical—serves to link tactical actions to the achievement of national objectives. According to Wong et al. (2003), Hunt's systems level leadership is applicable to the strategic level of warfare and concerns national policy and theater strategy. The organizational level is parallel to the operational level of and concerns military campaigns and major operations. Direct level leadership equates to the tactical level of warfare. The tactical level of war is where the close combat of battles and engagements take place (Wong et al., 2003).



Halpin (2011) noted that the devolution of greater authority to tactical-level leaders has not received adequate attention in the military leadership literature. This study seeks to partially fill that gap.

Hannah, Jennings, and Nobel (2010) assessed tactical-level leadership in the U.S. Army to provide a referent structure for future research. They conducted semi-structured interviews with three separate samples of junior officer leaders with recent combat experience. According to their research, some of the cognitive and affective attributes required of tactical-level leaders are hardiness, resilience, positive affectivity, and leadership efficacy. Hannah, Jennings et al. (2010) also identified confidence, courage, hope, optimism, and resilience as required attributes. Using inductive coding, they identified the following five major roles for tactical-level leaders:

1. Intelligence Manager—The leader collects intelligence; reports and shares intelligence; and disseminates and uses intelligence.
2. Tactical Warfighter—The leader displays tactical and technical proficiency; and tactical balance and restraint.
3. Diplomat—The leader counters insurgents by building collaborative relationships and resolving conflict through negotiation.
4. Nation Builder—The leader supports civil affairs assessments; coordinates and manages civil support processes; and facilitates local governance.
5. Troop and Unit Leader—The leader develops, trains, and motivates personnel; ensures unit cohesion and effectiveness; and ensures troop welfare and discipline (Hannah, Jennings et al., 2010, p. 428).

## **Positive Organizational Psychology**

Donaldson and Ko (2010) stated that positive psychology is now an “umbrella term used to stimulate and organize research, application, and scholarship on strengths, virtues, excellence, thriving, flourishing, resilience, flow, and optimal functioning in general” (p. 177). According to them, the positive psychology movement has inspired new applied research studies and practical applications well beyond traditional psychology. For example, Positive Organizational Psychology aims to improve organizational effectiveness by studying positive subjective traits and experiences in the workplace. Positive Organizational Psychology is an overarching term that includes both Positive Organizational Scholarship and Positive Organizational Behavior (Donaldson & Ko, 2010).

**Positive organizational scholarship.** Luthans and Youssef (2004) explained that Positive Organizational Scholarship emphasizes “positive organizational characteristics that can enhance organizational survival and effectiveness in times of crises and adverse conditions” (p. 152). For example, Peterson and Park (2006) proposed that strengths of character are a resource mostly untapped by typical organizations. They argued that people with good character find significance beyond themselves, and “are happier, healthier, more resilient, and more productive” (Peterson & Park, 2006, p. 1,153). They also stated that organizations could foster strengths of character by recognizing, celebrating, and encouraging those strengths (Peterson & Park, 2006).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) created an organizing schema of character strengths and virtues. They based their classifications on the core virtues that world

cultures have historically recognized (Dahlsgaard, Peterson, & Seligman, 2005). Peterson and Seligman (2004) described the virtues of wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence as the “core characteristics valued by moral philosophers and religious thinkers” (p. 13). According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), each virtue is comprised of multiple character strengths and a single person is unlikely to display all 24 of the character strengths. The virtue of wisdom and knowledge includes the character strengths of perspective, creativity, love of learning, judgment, and curiosity. The courage virtue includes zest, bravery, honesty, and perseverance. The virtue of humanity includes the character strengths of social intelligence, kindness, and love. The justice virtue includes leadership, teamwork, and fairness. The virtue of temperance includes the character strengths of self-regulation, forgiveness, prudence, and humility. The transcendence virtue includes appreciation of beauty and excellence, spirituality, hope, gratitude, and humor (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

**Positive organizational behavior.** Positive Organizational Behavior concerns individual qualities that influence the improvement of performance (Donaldson & Ko, 2010). Starting with considerations of the individual, Positive Organizational Behavior developed inductively to the group and then the organizational levels of analysis (Donaldson & Ko, 2010). Luthans (2002a) first proposed the Positive Organizational Behavior approach to the workplace. He defined Positive Organizational Behavior as the “study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (Luthans, 2002a, p. 59). Organizations can foster the learning, developing, changing, and managing (Luthans, 2002b) of

Positive Organizational Behavior through workplace interventions and proactive management (Luthans & Youssef, 2004).

**Psychological capital.** Luthans and Youssef (2004) described the collective capacities of Positive Organizational Behavior as Psychological Capital. In addition to the traditional considerations of human and social capital, Luthans, Luthans, and Luthans (2004) proposed that leaders also look at Psychological Capital as a means for improving organizational effectiveness. Resilience, optimism, hope, and confidence are the four components of Psychological Capital (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). According to Luthans et al. (2004), by “eschewing a preoccupation with personal shortcomings and dysfunctions and focusing instead on personal strengths and good qualities” (p. 45), leaders can develop Psychological Capital in their organizations.

In a study of 74 production workers at a small Midwestern manufacturing company, Larson and Luthans (2006) discovered Psychological Capital related significantly to job satisfaction and employee commitment. Their study suggests that Psychological Capital contributed more than human or social capital to job satisfaction and employee commitment. They characterized confidence, hope, and optimism as proactive states in the face of adversity. In contrast, they determined that resilience is more reactive (Larson & Luthans, 2006). Similarly, Luthans et al. (2006) proposed that confidence, hope, and optimism act as pathways to resilience.

Schaubroeck, Riolli, Peng, and Spain (2011) examined the influence that Psychological Capital had on soldiers during combat deployment. They predicted that soldiers with higher levels of trait Psychological Capital would perceive less threat to their safety and less feelings of loss during the deployment. They expected that soldiers

with high Psychological Capital scores would instead find more challenge, learning potential, and personal growth during deployment (Schaubroeck et al., 2011). During their tours in Iraq, 633 U.S. Army soldiers from nine infantry units completed responses for their study (Schaubroeck et al., 2011). When the researchers collected data during the summer of 2004, the soldiers surveyed had been combating the Iraqi insurgency for at least two or more months. The researchers examined stressful stimuli to include engaging in direct combat, seeing their peers injured or killed in action, and experiencing the burden to perform effectively in dangerous situations. They used measures of hope, optimism, and ego resilience to measure Psychological Capital.

Their factor analysis suggests that trait Psychological Capital predicts health and performance-related variables. They found that trait Psychological Capital negatively correlates with threat appraisal, loss appraisal, anxiety, somatic complaints, and depression. They also found that trait Psychological Capital correlates positively with challenge appraisal (Schaubroeck et al., 2011).

## **Chapter 2 Summary**

This chapter provided a review of the literature relevant to the purpose, research approach, and topic of this study. Resilience theory, military resilience, military leadership, and positive organizational psychology were all covered. The intent of this research effort is to add to the existing body of knowledge on military leadership and military resilience. The next chapter discusses the research design and methodology.

### **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

This study seeks to discover how leader practices and strategies can foster resilience in military personnel. Conceptually, this study takes a positive psychology approach to examining the phenomenon of fostering resilience in a military organization. Positive psychology focuses on strengths rather than weaknesses. By focusing on leadership strengths, this research uncovers successful strategies and practices that military leaders use to foster resilience in their organizations.

#### **Nature of the Study**

This research study is descriptive in nature. According to Butin (2010), descriptive research includes the “deliberate and systematic articulation and analysis of issues” (p. 1,215) that can support later action. This descriptive study answers the following research questions:

1. What current practices do military leaders employ to overcome adversity in their organizations?
2. What challenges do military leaders face in implementing those practices employed in overcoming adversity in their organizations?
3. How do military leaders measure their success at overcoming adversity in their organizations?
4. What recommendations would military leaders make to aspiring leaders wanting to overcome adversity in their organizations in the future?

The theoretical framework for this research is social constructivism. Creswell (2013) described social constructivism as seeking to understand the world that people live in through an examination of their experiences and what they mean. Research

conducted using a social constructivist framework relies on the views of study participants. From these views, the research develops patterns of meaning inductively (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), a research study that uses a constructivist framework “includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change” (p. 44).

This study employed qualitative methods to address the research questions posed. Creswell (2013) defined qualitative research as beginning with “assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 44). When conducting a qualitative study, Creswell (2013) pointed out that researchers make four philosophical assumptions.

1. Regarding the nature of reality, qualitative researchers make the ontological assumption that any topic under investigation will have multiple realities.
2. Regarding the epistemological assumption of how to justify knowledge claims, researchers conducting a qualitative study seek to minimize the objective distance between themselves and the participants of their study.
3. Qualitative researchers address the axiological assumption by specifically stating their values to the readers of the study.
4. The methodology of qualitative research is “inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 22).

This research study identified leadership strategies and practices for overcoming adversity in military organizations. The participants in this study provided an account of their experiences as military commanders in a war zone. The experience of war provided these military leaders, and the men that they led into combat, with the chance to exhibit resilience in the face of extreme adversity.

### **Research Methodology**

According to Creswell (2013), the five approaches to qualitative inquiry are narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. This research effort takes a phenomenological approach that incorporates interviews and content analysis. The results of a phenomenological study describe the shared meaning of common, lived experiences for a group of individuals that have all experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological study describes both “what” the individuals in the group have experienced and “how” they experienced it (Creswell, 2013).

Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2004) identified the two major approaches to phenomenology as hermeneutic and transcendental. Hermeneutic phenomenology is based on the work of German philosopher Martin Heidegger and is about the reflective interpretation of a study or text to gain a full understanding of its meaning (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Another German philosopher, Edmund Husserl, embraced the philosophical issues that underlie transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology is about finding the essence of human experience by building a composite and general description of meaning (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). This research effort employs



transcendental phenomenology to understand the essence of how military leaders foster resilience in their organizations.

## **Research Design**

A researcher makes several considerations when designing a qualitative research study. This section describes how the researcher selected participants for this study and how the sources of data were located. Additional topics discussed are criteria for inclusion, exclusion, and maximum variation. The section also addresses human subject consideration and data collection methods.

**Participant selection.** Participants chosen for a phenomenological study must have experienced the phenomenon under question. The population for this research study is United States Marine Corps infantry officers that commanded battalions in the Iraq or Afghanistan war zones between 2003 and 2014. The infantry battalion is the basic tactical unit of ground combat power for United States Marine Corps. Personnel assigned to infantry battalions are likely to experience extreme adversity while deployed to a combat zone. The Marine Corps battalion commander is the unit of analysis for this research effort.

This study employed purposeful sampling of the identified population. Research that is qualitative and phenomenological uses purposeful sampling because it informs an understanding of the problem under study (Creswell, 2013). The sampling size of participants for this study was 15 Marine Corps infantry officers that commanded battalions in the Iraq or Afghanistan war zones between 2003 and 2014.

**Sources of data.** Researchers must devise plans for locating and contacting participants for their study. As a retired Marine Corps Infantry Weapons Officer, the

author of this study knows former colleagues that met the criteria for participant selection. Using the LinkedIn social networking site, he developed a list of potential participants. The researcher obtained contact information for the potential participants from the LinkedIn social networking site. Many military professionals, like professionals from other fields, use social networking sites such as LinkedIn to maintain contact with current and former colleagues.

**Criteria for inclusion.** The researcher used criterion sampling to narrow the starting list of potential participants by selecting cases that meet specific criteria for inclusion in the sample (Creswell, 2013). He included only Marine Corps battalion commanders from the identified population that have since retired from active duty. The researcher, as a retired military officer that has previously served in combat, believes that distance in time and space from military service enables a more thoughtful recollection of the wartime experience.

**Criteria for exclusion.** The researcher excluded cases that did not meet specified criteria for inclusion in the sample (Creswell, 2013). He also excluded all battalion commanders from the population that were involuntarily relieved of their command responsibilities by the Marine Corps for any reason either during or immediately after their combat deployments. The researcher considers the relief of command as sufficient reason to believe that the excluded battalion commander's lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation may not be generalizable to the entire population of Marine Corps infantry officers that command a battalion in combat in either Iraq or Afghanistan between 2003 and 2014.

**Criteria for maximum variation.** After applying criteria for inclusion and exclusion, the identified list of former United States Marine Corps officers that commanded infantry battalions in Iraq or Afghanistan war zones between 2003 and 2014 remained larger than 20 potential participants. The researcher used maximum variation to further reduce the size of the list. Maximum variation is a strategy used by qualitative researchers to make certain that the study includes diverse perspectives (Creswell, 2013). The researcher achieved criteria for maximum variation by selecting a mix of battalion commanders that reflected wartime experiences in both Iraq and Afghanistan across the range of available deployment dates between 2003 and 2014.

**Human subjects consideration.** The experiences of the study participants provided the data necessary to understand how leader strategies and practices can influence military personnel to overcome adversity through resilience. The research methodology of this study required the approval of the Pepperdine University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This research study meets the requirements for exemption under the federal guidelines. The researcher received an IRB Exemption Notice (Appendix A) from the Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology Institutional Review Board.

**Data collection methods.** The researcher contacted each potential participant via LinkedIn messaging and invited those individuals to take part in this study. The researcher used a recruitment script (Appendix B) during initial and follow-up discussions to invite the participants. As each participant agreed to participate in the study, the researcher requested full contact information and provided a copy of the Informed Consent form (Appendix C) developed for this study. Each participant

acknowledged receipt and understanding of the Informed Consent by electronic mail.

The researcher reviewed the Informed Consent again with the participants immediately prior to conducting the telephone interviews.

The participants of this study were physically located throughout the continental United States, making face-to-face access for interviews problematic. Thus, the researcher scheduled telephone interviews for 120 minutes each for June through August of 2016. He sent reminder emails to each of the study participants, one week prior to the scheduled interview dates. This confirmation email included the researcher's contact information, the purpose and scope of the upcoming interview, and the date and time scheduled for the interview.

Prior to each interview, the researcher advised each of the participants that he would record the telephone interviews and later transcribe them personally. He offered each participant the opportunity to decline the recording of his interview. All participants agreed to the recording of their interviews. The researcher advised the participants that they would be able to review, check, and consent to the accuracy of interview transcriptions and notes. During the telephone interviews, he used two iPhones as recording devices to mitigate the failure of a single device.

The researcher transcribed the recorded interviews into Microsoft Word documents. He redacted all personally identifiable information and used pseudonyms to reference study participants and their military organizations. The researcher offered each participant an opportunity to review, check, and consent to the accuracy of the interview transcriptions and notes. Each participant consented accordingly. The researcher destroyed the audio recordings within one week after the candidate's final

defense of this dissertation. He is storing the electronic (written) interview transcripts on the hard drive of his password-protected personal computer for three years. A back-up version of the electronic (written) interview transcripts is located on the researcher's password-protected Carbonite cloud-based data storage service.

The researcher provided no incentives for participation in the study. The potential risks to study participants included feeling uncomfortable with certain questions, fatigue, and boredom. Another risk to study participants was the potential disclosure of privileged internal policies and procedures belonging to the military organizations in which they served.

### **Interview Protocol**

The researcher designed the following interview protocol specifically for this study. There was no requirement for the establishment of reliability for the data collection instrument. A preliminary committee of student peers reviewed and approved the interview protocol. The faculty dissertation committee finalized the protocol.

**Interview techniques.** At the beginning of each telephone interview, the researcher reviewed the provisions of the Informed Consent with the study participant. The researcher also reviewed the purpose and scope of the study. He informed study participants of the intended 120-minute duration of the interview and of the researcher's intent to audio record the sessions. He conducted the telephone interviews with each party alone in a closed room at their homes or place of work to ensure privacy.

The semi-structured interview questions were general, open-ended, and designed to develop an understanding of the phenomenon under study. The interview

questions for this study were sub-questions of the original research questions (Appendix D). The list of interview questions follows.

1. What practices did you employ to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?
2. What personal attributes enabled you to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?
3. What leadership skills enabled you to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?
4. What personal challenges did you face implementing practices to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?
5. How did you overcome those personal challenges during combat operations?
6. What challenges did your organization face overcoming adversity during combat operations?
7. How did your organization overcome those challenges during combat operations?
8. How did you prepare your organization to overcome adversity during combat operations?
9. How did you assess your organizations readiness to overcome adversity during combat operations?
10. How did you measure your organization's success at overcoming adversity during combat operations?

11. Is there anything that you have learned from your experience in overcoming adversity that you wish you knew prior to your organization's deployment for combat operations?

12. How would you recommend that aspiring military leaders prepare their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations?

The researcher encouraged the study participants to answer the interview questions thoughtfully and he provided them with opportunities to elaborate on their answers. Kvale (2006) pointed out that qualitative research interviews are often a "one-way dialogue" characterized by an asymmetrical distribution of power (p. 184). The researcher employed the Socratic approach to interviewing to develop maximum understanding of the phenomenon under study (Kvale, 2006). The Socratic approach to interviewing includes two-way dialogue with both the interviewer and study participant asking and answering questions to ensure a full exploration of each question. After each interview, the researcher thanked the participants for their contributions. He asked for and received verbal confirmation from each participant that follow-up contact was permissible to seek a better understanding of answers if required.

**Validity and reliability.** The researcher developed the interview questions for this study based on the research questions listed previously and a review of the literature. The interview questions are specific to the population of former United States Marine Corps officers that commanded infantry battalions in the Iraq or Afghanistan war zones between 2003 and 2014. The researcher specifically designed the research questions to uncover leadership strategies and practices related to the phenomenon of overcoming adversity in military organizations. He designed the interview questions to

encourage the study participants to share their experiences, challenges, and recommendations.

The researcher used a validation process to ensure the interview questions addressed the research questions effectively. First, he constructed a table showing the relationship between each of the four research questions and its corresponding interview questions to establish *prima facie* validity. In the second step of the validation process, a panel of three student peers in the Pepperdine Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program reviewed a summary statement of the purpose and scope of the study. The student peers also assessed the validity of the interview protocol. Each of the panel members had previously completed graduate-level courses in quantitative and qualitative research methods and data analysis. The panel members had also engaged in conducting qualitative research and the practice of instrument validity during their studies at Pepperdine University.

The researcher asked the panel members to review each interview question carefully, and then assess whether that question could measure the data needed to answer the corresponding research question. The panel affirmed, without any modifications, that the interview questions were directly relevant to each of the four research questions. The researcher's faculty dissertation committee, acting as a panel of experts, was standing ready to resolve any differences between the researcher and the peer-review panel regarding the interview questions. The peer-review panel made no recommendations for modification of the interview questions.



## **Statement of Limitations and Personal Bias**

According to Creswell (2012), researchers cannot set aside their own experiences entirely. The author of this study concedes that personal bias may have influenced the interpretation of the data collected. The author is a retired United States Marine Corps Infantry Weapons Officer with over 20 years of active duty experience. In addition, the author participated in two combat deployments to Iraq in 2003 and 2004. The author retired from active duty in 2007. The Marine Corps assigns one Infantry Weapons Officer to each of its 24 infantry battalions. More commonly known as Marine Gunners, these officers are prior enlisted infantry personnel with exceptional records of achievement and at least 16 years of service. The Marine Corps selects only a few Marine Gunners each year from a pool of highly qualified applicants. The Marine Gunner is the subject matter expert on weapons and tactics in the infantry battalion. The Gunner provides counsel on the training and employment of the infantry battalion's men and weapons against the enemy. The Gunner does not command troops. Instead, the Gunner is a principal advisor to the infantry battalion commander.

The author of this study is a military insider. Members of an organization that are studying their own organization are conducting insider research (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Insider researchers are actors in the processes under study. Many academics consider insiders as being too close to maintain objectivity or conduct valid research within their organizations (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Because insider researchers have formed insights about their organizations and gained knowledge from their own lived experience, their tendency towards loyalty or empathy may negatively influence their research (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). In addition, insider researchers may assume

that they already know the answers to their questions. Peer-reviewed journals often decline to publish insider research for these reasons. Despite these concerns, Brannick and Coghlan (2007) have affirmed the value of insider research. According to them, insider researchers, precisely because they are insiders, can understand, reframe, and express tacit knowledge as theoretical knowledge (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data. Qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up, by organizing the data inductively into increasingly more abstract units of information (Creswell, 2013). This inductive process involves researchers working back and forth between the themes and the database until they establish a comprehensive set of themes (Creswell, 2013). Drawing on methods previously discussed by Moustakas (1994), Creswell recommended six steps when conducting a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013, pp. 193-194). The researcher used the following six steps, based on Creswell (2012), to conduct this study.

1. The researcher described his firsthand experiences with the phenomenon under study.
2. The researcher developed a list of significant statements found in the electronic [written] interview transcripts about how the participants experienced the phenomenon under study. The researcher then coded these statements by reducing and aggregating them into meaningful elements.

3. The researcher grouped the resulting coded elements and classified them into general themes. In qualitative research, themes are comprehensive units of information that form a common idea.
4. The researcher developed textual descriptions of what happened when the study participants experienced the phenomenon. The researcher included verbatim examples in the development of these textual descriptions.
5. The researcher developed structural descriptions of how the study participants experienced what happened. The structural descriptions reflect the context in which the study participants experienced the phenomenon.
6. Using the textual and structural descriptions, the research developed a composite description, or essence, of the study participants' experience with the phenomenon under investigation.

### **Interrater Reliability**

The researcher used a three-step coding process. He coded the data in the first step. The researcher discussed the results of coding for the first five interviews with peer reviewers in the second step. In the third step, once the researcher completed the coding of all remaining interviews, he again submitted the coding results to the peer reviewers for feedback. The faculty dissertation committee, serving as a panel of experts, stood ready to resolve any differences.

**Coding by the researcher.** The researcher reviewed the electronic (written) transcripts from five of study participants' responses and identified key words or phrases from each interview. He treated each statement in the resulting list as having equal value. The researcher created a table of interview questions with the

corresponding key words or phrases. He extracted codes from the data and identified themes to organize into common categories and patterns.

**Peer review.** The researcher discussed results with peer reviewers in the second step. He submitted the resulting coding and preliminary themes obtained from the first five interviews for review by two doctoral students peers enrolled in the same Organizational Leadership program at Pepperdine University. Both peer reviewers had training in qualitative research methods and data analysis. After receiving feedback from the peer reviewers, the researcher discussed the feedback with them to resolve any areas of non-consensus between the researcher's coding results and the feedback from the peer reviewers. He used the coding results for the first five interviews as the basis for coding the remaining interviews.

**Expert review.** In the third step, after the researcher completed the coding of all interviews, he submitted the results again to the peer reviewers for feedback. Discussions with the peer reviewers ensured that there was consensus between the researcher and the reviewers regarding the coding results. If consensus was not possible, the faculty dissertation committee panel, acting as a panel of experts, was standing ready to remedy the differences. However, the researcher and the reviewers reached consensus without issue.

### **Chapter 3 Summary**

This chapter explained the nature of the study and the research methodology employed in the study. This research study followed a phenomenological approach that incorporated semi-structured interviews and then provided a detailed analysis of the resulting data. The 15 participants that agreed to take part in this study, now all retired,

were United States Marine Corps infantry officers that commanded battalions in the Iraq or Afghanistan war zones between 2003 and 2014. This chapter discussed the interview protocol, to include the 12 interview questions developed specifically for this study. This chapter also reviewed the data analysis techniques and procedures in detail. The next chapter discusses the findings of the study.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

The purpose of this study was to identify leadership strategies and practices that foster resilience in military organizations. This entailed determining what challenges military leaders face in implementing practices aimed at fostering resilience in their organizations. Also examined was how military leaders measure success at fostering resilience in their organizations. Finally, this study considered what recommendations military leaders would make to aspiring military leaders wanting to foster resilience in their organizations in the future.

Military leadership can impact the protective and organizational factors that influence a service-member's ability to be resilient. Statistics suggest that about 10% of service members that have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan are suffering from high or chronic post-traumatic stress (Bonanno et al., 2012). Most military personnel and their leaders have successfully developed the ability to maintain effective functioning, despite the stress and pressure created by friction on the battlefield (Hystad et al., 2015). Sinclair et al. (2013) have called for more research on why most service members do not develop mental health problems when exposed to stressors. This study answers that call.

### **Participants**

The population for this research study was United States Marine Corps infantry officers that commanded battalions in the Iraq or Afghanistan wars zone between 2003 and 2014. This study used purposeful sampling of 15 participants from the identified population. The participants in this study are no longer on active duty in the United States Marine Corps.

All 15 of the participants in this study graduated from four-year college prior to entering military service. Following their commissioning, each participant attended the Marine Officer Candidate School at Quantico, Virginia. All the participants in this study are males. During the time that these participants served, the military restricted female officers from serving in infantry units. At the time that each participant led his battalion in combat in either Iraq or Afghanistan, their average age was 39 years. Their average amount of time served on active duty was 17 years. Nine of the participants had previous combat experience.

The researcher numbered the participants in order of the date that they deployed to combat. Participants P1-P5 all participated in the initial invasion of Iraq in early 2003. Two of the first five participants deployed back to Iraq a second time, in command of the same battalion, within seven months of their first return home. Participants P6 and P7 deployed to Iraq in late 2003 and early 2004 respectively. These deployments occurred at the time when the U.S. Armed Forces were restoring civil order and the rule of law in Iraq. One of these two commanders deployed back to Iraq with the same battalion soon after returning home.

Participants P8 and P9 deployed to Iraq in 2005 and 2006. At the time of these two deployments, the insurgency in Iraq had fully evolved, setting the stage for the "Anbar Awakening." One of these commanders deployed a second time with the same battalion within a year of returning home. Participants P10, P11, and P12 deployed to Iraq during 2007–2009. These deployments occurred during the time that U.S. Armed Forces were again restoring civil order and the rule of law. None of these commanders

deployed a second time with their battalions. Two of the battalion commanders from group P1-P12 later commanded infantry regiments in Afghanistan.

Participants P13, P14, and P15 all deployed to Afghanistan between 2009 and 2014. At the time of these deployments, U.S. Armed Forces were restoring essential public services and promoting democracy in Afghanistan. At the same time, the military was also targeting the Taliban presence when and where it consolidated. None of these commanders deployed a second time.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for this study adhered to the final interview protocol presented previously. The data collection instrument did not require the establishment of reliability. The researcher collected data over four months from June 18, 2016 to September 31, 2016. He conducted telephone interviews with each participant using semi-structured interview questions developed specifically to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under study. All interviews lasted between 70 and 120 minutes. At the time of each telephone interview, the researcher reviewed the provisions of the Informed Consent as well as the purpose and scope of the study with each participant.

The researcher informed each study participant of his intent to audio record the interview sessions. He conducted the interviews using a two-way dialogue with both the researcher and study participant asking and answering questions to explore each interview question thoroughly. The study participants answered the questions thoughtfully and often elaborated on their answers to ensure clarity of understanding. The dates that each interview occurred are in the table that follows.



Table 1

*Participants and Dates Interviewed*

Participant	Date Interviewed
P1	June 18, 2016
P2	June 20, 2016
P3	June 22, 2016
P4	September 16, 2016
P5	September 17, 2016
P6	September 11, 2016
P7	September 14, 2016
P8	August 29, 2016
P9	September 23, 2016
P10	July 31, 2016
P11	September 31, 2016
P12	June 21, 2016
P13	July 20, 2016
P14	July 24, 2016
P15	September 12, 2016

**Data Analysis**

The researcher accomplished data analysis by building patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up. Using the electronic (written) interview transcripts developed from the recorded interviews, the researcher compiled a list of significant statements about how the participants experienced the phenomenon under study. He then coded these statements by reducing and aggregating them into meaningful elements. The researcher treated each statement in the resulting list of elements as having equal value. He organized the data inductively by grouping and classifying the resulting coded elements into general themes.

**Data Display**

The data results presented are textual descriptions of what happened when the study participants experienced the phenomenon. In Chapter Five, the researcher presents descriptions of how the study participants experienced the phenomenon.

Using textual and structural descriptions, the researcher developed an essence of the study participants' experience. The researcher organized and displayed the data here in Chapter Four by research question and interview questions as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Research Questions and Interview Questions*

Research question	Interview questions
1	1, 2, 3
2	4, 5, 6, 7
3	8, 9, 10
4	11, 12

The researcher presented the synthesis of data results in Chapter Five. The researcher developed this study's interview questions with the intent of synthesizing the interview question groups' data shown in Table 2 to answer the following four research questions:

1. What current practices do military leaders employ to overcome adversity in their organizations?
2. What challenges do military leaders face in implementing those practices employed in overcoming adversity in their organizations?
3. How do military leaders measure their success at overcoming adversity in their organizations?
4. What recommendations would military leaders make to aspiring leaders wanting to overcome adversity in their organizations in the future?

The interview questions for this study were sub-questions of the original research questions. The list of interview questions follows.

1. What practices did you employ to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?

2. What personal attributes enabled you to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?
3. What leadership skills enabled you to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?
4. What personal challenges did you face implementing practices to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?
5. How did you overcome those personal challenges during combat operations?
6. What challenges did your organization face overcoming adversity during combat operations?
7. How did your organization overcome those challenges during combat operations?
8. How did you prepare your organization to overcome adversity during combat operations?
9. How did you assess your organization's readiness to overcome adversity during combat operations?
10. How did you measure your organization's success at overcoming adversity during combat operations?
11. Is there anything that you have learned from your experience in overcoming adversity that you wish you knew prior to your organization's deployment for combat operations?
12. How would you recommend that aspiring military leaders prepare their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations?

## Data Collection Results

The researcher organized the data collection results presented here by inductively working back and forth between the database, elements, and themes and nauseam from the beginning of October 2016 to the middle of January 2017. The researcher included verbatim examples in the development of these textual descriptions. He redacted all personally identifiable information and used pseudonyms to reference the study participants (i.e. P1, P2...P15).

**Research question 1.** Research question one asked: What current practices do military leaders employ to overcome adversity in their organizations? The intent of this question was to provide the study participants with an early opportunity to express their main ideas and thoughts about overcoming adversity and fostering resilience.

Regarding his experience with the phenomenon, P5 explained that “we were not talking resilience back when I was doing this” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). Likewise, P6 said “we were doing it [fostering resilience], we just were not using those words” (personal communication, September 11, 2016).

All the participants stated that for a military unit to overcome adversity in combat, the commander must build resilience in the organization prior to the combat deployment. These comments support prior assertions found in the literature about the relationship between unit cohesion and resilience (Britt & Oliver, 2013; Meredith et al., 2011). Indicative of this sentiment, P1 observed, “units are resilient because of the investment that’s made before you go to combat” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). The following three interviews questions pertain to research question one.

1. What practices did you employ to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?
2. What personal attributes enabled you to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?
3. What leadership skills enabled you to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?

**Interview question 1.** What practices did you employ to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization? Previous research has noted that resilience is mostly a group-level phenomenon in the military because team members rely on each other to work effectively in high-threat environments (Adler, 2013). This study accounts for multiple responses because some participants shared more than one practice. From the participants' answers to interview question one, three themes emerged (see Figure 1).

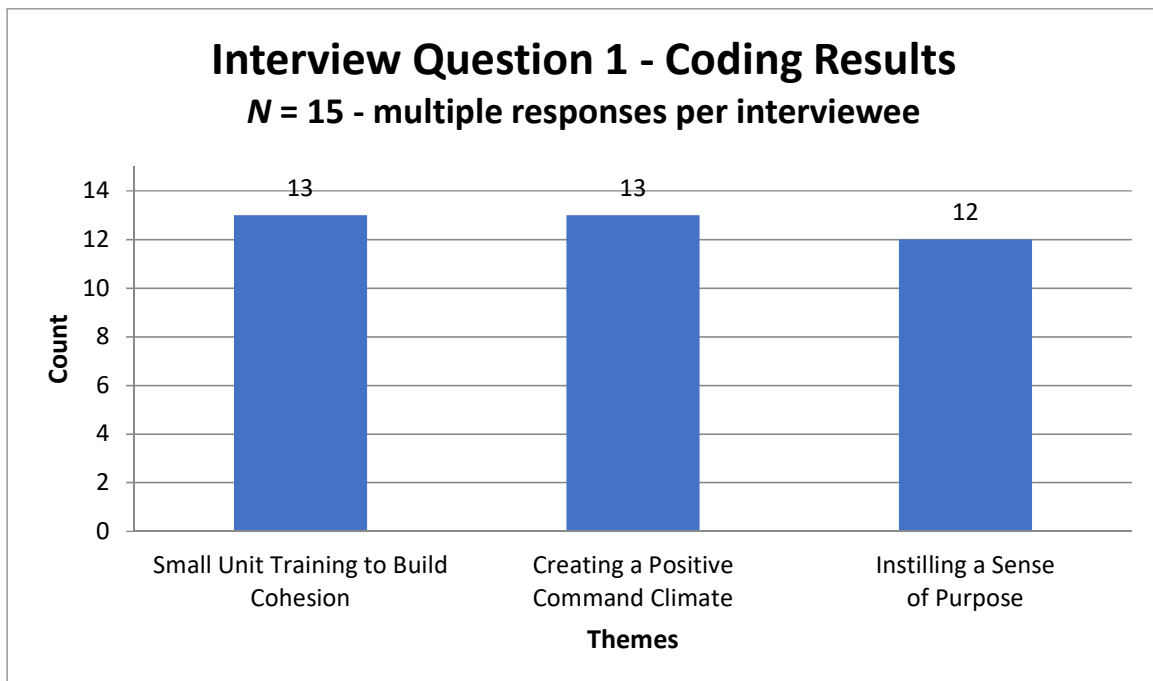


Figure 1. Practices employed to overcome adversity in combat.

*Small-unit training to build cohesion.* Thirteen of 15 participants (87%) identified small unit training to build cohesion as a practice that fostered resilience in their military organization. Unit cohesion is a social construct that enables a military unit to work together towards accomplishing assigned missions (Britt & Oliver, 2013). This finding affirms a prior suggestion in the literature regarding the identification of combat training as the decisive factor that binds military groups together (King, 2006). P1 remarked that cohesion is the result of “shared hardship and shared training” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P2 emphasized that “training pulls a fighting unit together” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P9 stated that on the battlefield, “good teams counteract the effects of adversity” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). The researcher coded three elements as part of the small unit training to build cohesion theme. Those elements were (1) building cohesion takes time, (2) trust and mutual respect, and the (3) importance of subordinate leaders to building cohesion.

Eleven participants (73%) discussed how *building cohesion takes time*. The study participants mostly agreed that they would have liked more time to train their units and build cohesion prior to their combat deployments. P12 stated, “I had a really difficult time building cohesion because I got lots of [new] Marines just prior to deployment” (personal communication, June 21, 2016). Faced with the same challenge, P7 told his unit that “the best way to be a veteran is to bring a new guy in” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). Characterizing the arrival of new personnel late in the training cycle as a systemic personnel management problem, P6 admonished that the Marine Corps needs to “get in-synch on this” (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P10 admitted, “I do not think I overcame the time challenge”

(personal communication, July 31, 2016). P8 declared, “I blame the institution” for not providing enough time (personal communication, August 29, 2016).

Seven participants (47%) provided their thoughts on unit cohesion being about *trust and mutual respect*. This finding affirms a prior suggestion in the literature that primary group cohesion is about trust among group members and the capacity for teamwork (Siebold, 2007). P1 described cohesion in a military unit as having “mutual respect, being invested in each other and relying on the man to your left and your right” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P3 stated that cohesion is about having “trust in the man to your left and right” (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P5 explained, “you need a culture of resilience in the unit because we are only as brave as the unit we move with” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). Similarly, P1 observed, “what enables individuals to overcome adversity in combat is the unit’s ability to overcome adversity in combat” (personal communication, June 18, 2016).

Six participants (40%) referenced the *importance of subordinate leaders to building cohesion*. As noted by Siebold (2007), primary group cohesion is comprised of both peer and leader bonding. Peer bonding is among members of a military unit at the same hierarchical level such as a squad, platoon, or company. Leader bonding is between seniors and subordinates at the unit level. Primary group cohesion is about trust among group members and the capacity for teamwork (Siebold, 2007). P11 declared, “getting leaders late in the training cycle was a nightmare” (personal communication, September 31, 2016). Conversely, P2 kept most of his key leaders for a second combat deployment and “felt we were invincible” because “we all thought the same” (personal communication, June 20, 2016).

*Creating a positive command climate.* Of the 15 participants, 13 (87%) identified *creating a positive command climate* as a practice that fostered resilience in their military organization. According to Doty and Gelineau (2008), command climate in the military is the “culture of a unit” and the leader “is solely responsible for the organization’s command climate” (p. 22). This finding affirms a prior suggestion in the literature regarding positive command climate being one of the organizational factors that influence resilience in the military (Meredith et al., 2011). The researcher coded the following four elements as part of the *creating a positive command climate* theme. Those elements are (1) *earn their trust*, (2) *maintain discipline*, (3) *treat men with respect*, and (4) *have fun*.

Among the participants, 10 (67%) stated that the commander’s ability to *earn their trust* is a critical element of creating positive command climate. As noted in the literature review, past studies have shown that military personnel who trust their leaders are more willing to accept the influence of those leaders (Sweeney et al., 2009). Trust is the most significant component of effective in-extremis leadership (Fisher et al., 2010). P1 described a positive command climate as the Marines being “invested in the command” and having “faith in their leadership” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). Likewise, P9 stated that positive command climate is about the “Marines having confidence in their leader” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). As pointed out by P3, trust is essential because “your decisions are not going to be popular” (personal communication, June 22, 2016) in combat.

Several commanders pointed out the need to earn the trust of their Marines’ families as well. P1 said, “I worked to earn the families trust as much as the Marines



trust” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P7 said that he focused on families to give them confidence that we were ready to deploy (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P9 noted, “I did a lot of outreach to the wives because he thought it was important that they knew who he was” (personal communication, September 23, 2016).

P11 observed that face-to-face contact with the Marines was essential for a leader to *earn their trust* (personal communication, September 31, 2016). P1 found that “being a 43-year-old that can communicate with a 21-year-old” was also helpful (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P13 was willing to “explain to the Marines what he was all about” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P5 noted that earning trust requires “good judgment” because “we are older and they expect it” (personal communication, September 17, 2016).

Among the participants, eight (53%) emphasized the commander’s need to *maintain discipline* as an aspect of creating a positive command climate. P3 described his battalion has having “sturdy mental, moral, and spiritual discipline” and explained that “having expectations and demanding adherence to them” is how a commander maintains discipline (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P1 discussed, “flat holding them and yourself accountable” (personal communication, Jun 18, 2016). P11 stated, “you have turned the corner when the NCOs (non-commissioned officers) are maintaining the standards” (personal communication, September 31, 2016).

Among the participants, five (33%) identified a willingness to *treat men with respect* as another component of creating a positive command climate. P13 explained that the commander should “treat Marines like men, and they will behave like men”

(personal communication, July 20, 2016). Participants pointed out the importance of respecting the opinions and contributions of their Marines as well. P8 stated, “we [the Marine Corps] are a culture that supports having an opinion because everyone knows that once a decision is made, we go with it” (personal communication, August 29, 2016). P9 observed, “the younger generation [of Marines] expects to contribute so that they have ownership” (personal communication, September 23, 2016).

Among the participants, five (33%) described encouraging their Marines to *have fun* as a contributor to creating a positive command climate. P12 indicated that having fun was “part of his [leadership] philosophy” (personal communication, June 21, 2016). P4 observed, “humor allows guys to relax” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). Based on his experience working with the British Royal Marines, P7 adopted their mantra of “cheerfulness under adversity” (personal communication, September 14, 2016).

*Instilling a sense of purpose.* Of the 15 participants, 12 (80%) identified *instilling a sense of purpose* as a practice that fostered resilience in their military organization. This finding is significant because previous studies of military resilience have not identified *instilling a sense of purpose* as an organizational factor that influences resilience. The researcher coded the following two elements as part of the *instilling a sense of purpose* theme. Those elements are the (1) *importance of having purpose* and (2) *instilling purpose takes time*.

Among the participants, eight (53%) discussed the *importance of having purpose*. Nations go to war to advance a political purpose. Protecting national interests is a noble cause that provides a sense of purpose for service members to go to war. For

example, P2 explained to his Marines that their invasion of Iraq in 2003 was “sanctioned by our government” and “what we were doing was justified” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). In addition to protecting national interests, military ethos provides another purpose for service members to go to war. Military personnel aspire to achieve the full realization of martial virtue (Jennings & Hannah, 2011). Martial virtue includes such ideals as honor, courage, commitment, and sacrifice (Jennings & Hannah, 2011). P1 pointed toward the border and said “gentlemen, the way home is north through Baghdad” and “we are all in this together” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P3 reminded his men that our “ancestors are watching” and the “American people believe that the Marines will always win on the battlefield and so we have too” (personal communication, June 22, 2016).

However, if the war drags on and the strategy for winning the war appears misguided or public support for the war fades, the original purpose of fighting to protect national interests becomes less valid. By 2006 in Iraq, P9 was asking, “How long does this insurgency need to go on before we realize what is going on?” (personal communication, September 23, 2016) P9 further commented, “Marines can see when the strategy is not working” and this makes it “much harder to bounce back from the shit show of not understanding the mission” (personal communication, September 23, 2016) P9 stated that military men and women will certainly begin to ask, “why am I going to risk my life for this?” (personal communication, September 23, 2016) As P9 went on to explain, “the Vietnam guys had so much trouble because their mission was not winnable” (personal communication, September 23, 2016).

According to the study participants, once the political purpose for going to war becomes questionable, leaders must rely *solely* on military ethos and martial virtue to provide purpose. P13 observed that some of his Marines “extended for their 3rd and 4th combat tours so that they could deploy with their roommates” and hopefully see the war through to conclusion (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P11 said that when his battalion deployed to Iraq in 2007, he and his men were “having trouble seeing the value in the mission and thought it would just go back to shit when they left” (personal communication, September 31, 2016). In 2009, with the U.S. presence in Iraq drawing down, P12 was asking himself “why stop oil smugglers?” and “what is the value of a Marine’s life for this type of mission?” (personal communication, June 21, 2016). In 2014, toward the end of U.S. combat deployments to Afghanistan, P15 was attempting to convince his Marines that “the mission was still important” and “there is good in what we are doing” (personal communication, September 12, 2016).

Among the participants, five (40%) recognized that *instilling purpose takes time*. P5 stated, “the commander and the senior leadership are responsible for meaning making” and for “putting things in context in the combat environment” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). To be successful, P12 noted the commander needs time to “get past story-telling and have Marines take ownership” (personal communication, June 21, 2016). P11 provided Marines with “continuous reinforcement of why we are here, and what we are doing” (personal communication, September 31, 2016). Reflecting on his battalion’s time in Afghanistan, P13 explained that “as a leader, you have to make up your mind about what your message is, and then communicate it every single day of the deployment” (personal communication, July 20, 2016).

**Interview question 2.** What personal attributes enabled you to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization? This study accounts for multiple responses because some participants shared more than one attribute. Several participants stressed the importance of modeling these attributes as a means of setting the example for their Marines. For example, P7 commented, “personal example is the one thing that you must do and if you don’t do it, they see it” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P4 noted, “we are a social animal, so people are always looking at us” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P1 said, “if something’s important to you, it will be important to them” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). From the participants’ answers to interview question two, three themes emerged (see Figure 2). These three attributes support the idea that the resilience process begins at a point of biopsychospiritual (mental, physical, and spiritual) homeostasis (Richardson, 2002).

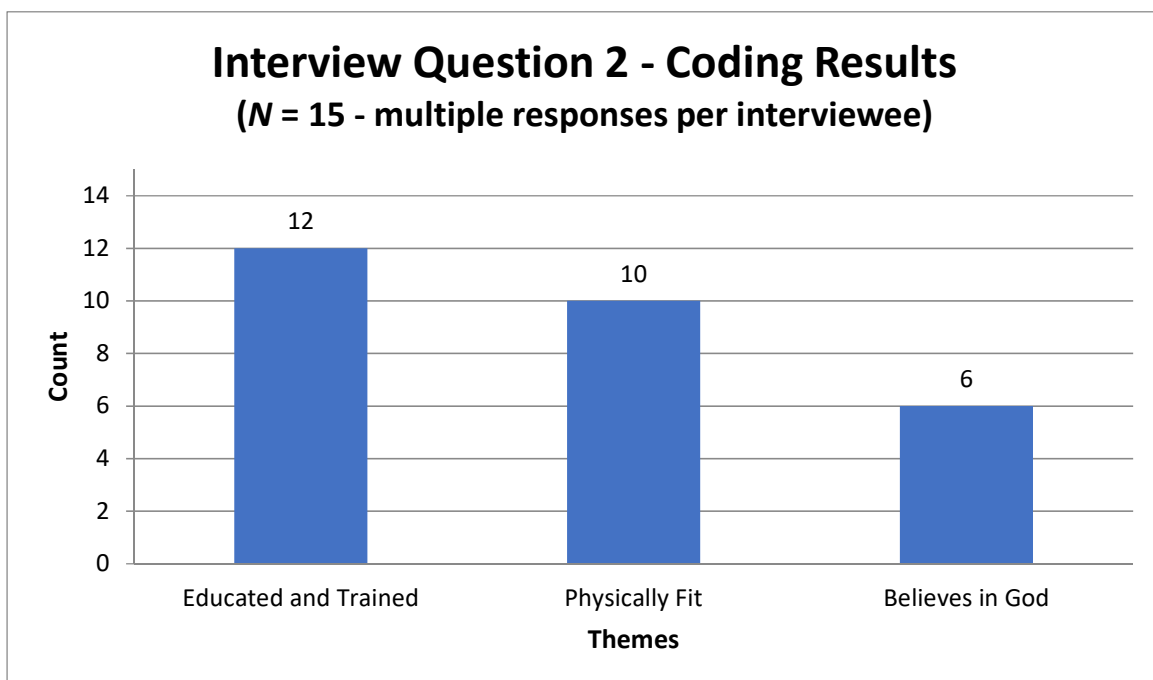


Figure 2. Personal attributes for overcoming adversity in combat.

*Educated and trained.* Of the 15 participants, 12 (80%) identified *educated and trained* as an attribute that enabled them to personally overcome adversity. This finding supports the ideas that *in-extremis* leaders are inherently motivated and oriented towards learning (Kolditz, 2005) and that lifelong pursuit of expert knowledge is an intrinsic factor that motivates military professionals (Snider, 2012). This finding also confirms a prior assertion in the literature about the positive relationship between efficacy and resilience (Lee et al., 2013). P13 said, “I have always prided myself that I am constantly in a learning mode” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P1 proudly acknowledged, “I knew I was prepared, I prepared my whole life” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). The researcher coded the following two elements as part of the *educated and trained* theme. Those elements are (1) *institutional military training* and (2) *being well-read* on the art and science of war.

Among the participants, nine (60%) commented on the value of the *institutional military training* that they received from the Marine Corps. Institutional training included both tactical training and leadership training. P8 concluded, “the Marine Corps took the raw material and developed me progressively” (personal communication, August 29, 2016). P9 pointed out that after joining the Marine Corps, “he took on the tough schools and the tough assignments” to ensure that he was ready to lead men in combat (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P1 characterized his institutional training as “the Marine Corps had invested in me” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P4 shared that “tactical proficiency made him a confident leader” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P6 stated, “all my training had prepared me for battle” (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P7 specifically called attention

to the training he received to plan tactical operations (personal communication, September 14, 2016). Likewise, P2 claimed that doing his “best to plan our operations” would help to make the “mission successful” and give his Marines a “fighting advantage” (personal communication, June 20, 2016).

Among the participants, six (40%) addressed the importance of *being well-read* on the art and science of war. P3 claimed that he read widely to “understand the role of the commander in combat” (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P2 remarked that his reading about warfare provided an “understanding of the nature of war and just war theory” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P8 confessed, “I read all the time because history is about as close as you can get to experience...my vocation and my avocation were the same thing” and thus, “I encountered 100 dilemmas on the battlefield that other people had already encountered” (personal communication, August 29, 2016).

*Physically fit.* Of the 15 participants, 10 (67%) believed that being *physically fit* was an attribute that enabled them to overcome adversity. This finding confirms prior assertions found in the literature about the causal relationship between fitness and resilience (Meredith et al., 2011). The researcher coded the following three elements as part of the *physically fit* theme. Those elements are: the (a) *need for functional fitness*, (b) *conducting rigorous physical training*, and the (c) *fitness builds tolerance for adversity*.

Among the participants, five (33%) noted the *need for functional fitness* training that accurately replicates the grueling demands of the battlefield. P3 claimed that he was “fit for purpose” prior to his battalion’s combat deployment (personal

communication, June 22, 2016). P1 described how his battalion's physical training program focused on "things that were different than standard fitness, more functional in nature" (personal communication, June 18, 2016). Recognizing the importance of being functionally fit, P5 remarked that Marines should "shed the old ways of thinking" and prepare for combat physically with the same attitude that professional athletes train for their respective sports (personal communication, September 11, 2016).

Among the participants, five (33%) emphasized the necessity for *conducting rigorous physical training*. P7 justified his demanding physical training program by noting, "there will be time when you want to quit and you cannot quit" (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P8 said that his training programs took Marines to the point of "physical exhaustion" (personal communication, August 29, 2016) at each event. P9 remarked that the Marines must "feel their heart pounding out of their chests" (personal communication, September 23, 2016) during physical training. P4 explained how he and his subordinate officers would conduct physical training until completely exhausted and then participate in a tactical decision exercise to replicate the duress of the battlefield (personal communication, September 16, 2016).

Among the participants, five (33%) also expressed their understanding that *fitness builds tolerance for adversity*. For example, P3 said that he put himself in "a hurt locker" to build a tolerance for adversity (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P13 observed that physical fitness is a "critical piece for overcoming adversity" (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P1 commented similarly, saying that "physical fitness is an essential element of resiliency" (personal communication, June 18, 2016).



*Believes in God.* Of the 15 participants, six (40%) acknowledged that *believing in God* was an attribute that specifically enabled them to overcome adversity. As shown in the literature review, spirituality is a component of resilience per the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The Army's Consolidated Soldier Fitness (CSF) program also addresses spirituality without reference to any specific religious beliefs and practices (Peterson et al., 2011). The researcher coded two elements as part of the *believes in God* theme. Those elements are (1) *faith provides confidence* and (2) *command is lonely without faith*.

Among the participants, four (27%) explained how *faith provides confidence* to lead Marines through the rigors of combat. P6 said, "knowing that there is an afterlife" provided him with that assurance (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P2 said that as a leader, "you don't want to show weakness or signs of faltering and so this [belief in God] helped me" (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P1 proudly admitted that it was "faith in self, faith in the unit, and faith in God that gave us confidence in our ability to carry the day" (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P15 said that believing in something greater than yourself improves chances (personal communication, September 12, 2016).

Among the participants, four (27%) also remarked that *command is lonely without God*. P2 claimed that you need a spiritual background because "for a leader trying to do it alone, it is not a good thing" (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P2 stated, "I prayed that the good Lord was watching over us during combat operations" (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P14 credited his success as a combat leader to "solid faith and being able to pray at night" (personal communication, July 24, 2016).

P15 said as well that “being the commander can be very lonely, but if you are a spiritual person, you are not alone” (personal communication, September 12, 2016).

**Interview question 3.** What leadership skills enabled you to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization? P11 stated, “the tools that I used were the leadership skills that I learned along the way” (personal communication, September 31, 2016). This study accounts for multiple responses because some participants shared more than one leadership skill. From the participants’ answers to interview question three, five themes emerged (see Figure 3).

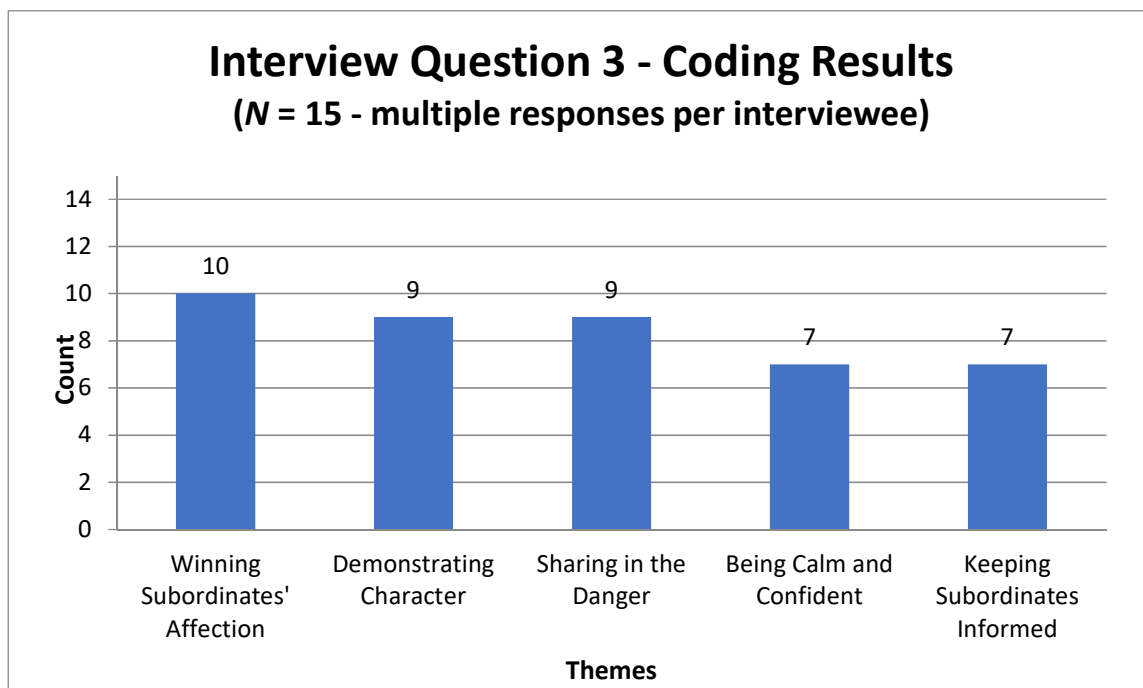


Figure 3. Leadership skills for overcoming adversity in combat.

*Winning subordinates' affection.* Of 15 participants, 10 (67%) indicated that *winning their affection* is a leadership skill that fostered resilience in their military organization. Success in battle requires a bond of affection between the commander and his Marines. As P1 pointed out, the Marines “can hate their commanders and they will still muscle through the training” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). The

researcher coded two elements as part of the *winning their affection* theme. Those elements are (1) *show concern* and (2) *build relationships*.

Among the participants, eight (53%) commented on the need to for a commander to *show concern* for the men in his battalion. P7 said that leaders must “show concern about their [the Marines] welfare” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P3 described the need for a commander to show “*genuine concern*” (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P5 stated that the Marines “must know that you care about them” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). P2 was proud to say that he would give his Marines “a big bear hug” as “an embrace of brotherly affection” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P2 further stated, “I loved my Marines, but at the same time I could also send them to their possible deaths” (personal communication, June 20, 2016).

Among the participants, six (40%) recognized that the commander should *build relationships* with subordinates. P11 discussed “getting kneecap to kneecap and building personal relationships with these kids” (personal communication, September 31, 2016). P1 talked about communicating “father to son” to with his Marines (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P4 made an effort to “know about them, know where they came from, know what their girlfriend’s name was” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P7 recalled that some commanders did not have this leadership skill and “so they fucked things up” (personal communication, September 14, 2016).

*Demonstrating character.* Of 15 participants, nine (60%) stated *demonstrating character* is a necessary leadership skill for fostering resilience. Personal adaptation to adversity requires positive psychological functioning which is boosted by strengths of

character (Boermans et al., 2012). During his career as a leader of Marines, P1 noticed “they [the Marines] never do what they’re told, they do what they see” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). Followers consider leaders dependable if they have good character traits and establish interdependent relationships (Sweeney et al., 2009). The researcher coded four elements as part of the *demonstrating character* theme. Those elements are (1) *moral courage*, (2) *humility*, (3) *honesty*, and (4) *empathy*.

Among the participants, six (40%) indicated that a leader must show *moral courage*. P1 claimed “moral and ethical courage are essential” because in combat, “there are things that will challenge you to your core” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P6 stated a commander cannot “take no for an answer from higher headquarters when it comes to taking care of the men” (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P14 also recommended commanders “not be concerned about career” and “just do right by the Marines” (personal communication, July 24, 2016). P5 observed that moral courage is also about “not trying to be the strongest guy in the battalion” or the “iconic war leader” (personal communication, September 17, 2016).

Among the participants, five (33%) believed that *humility* is a significant character trait for leaders. P5 warned against the pitfalls of hubris for a combat leader (personal communication, September 17, 2016). P9 cautioned that “when something is bad or something is screwed up, you need to tell them, because by the way, they already know” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P7 believed in the importance of being “introspective and big enough to recognize when there are problems” (personal communication, September 14, 2016).

Among the participants, five (33%) emphasized that *honesty* is an essential character trait for leaders. P5 discussed the need for a commander to “be authentic, open, and honest” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). P9 said it was important to “be honest and acknowledge their intellect” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P8 stressed “the importance of honesty in the little things” and “having a reputation for saying exactly what you mean” (personal communication, August 29, 2016). Leaders expect that honesty will be reciprocal. P7 noted that commanders need “guys to tell you the truth when something is not working” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P9 also stated that “the leader has to have people that will tell him the truth” (personal communication, September 23, 2016).

Among the participants, five (33%) recommended that leaders also show *empathy*. P6 cautioned against leaders just saying “buck-up and carry on” to their Marines (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P11 insisted that a commander must be able to “show empathy with what the young Marine is going through” (personal communication, September 31, 2016). P8 remarked that he was able “show empathy” for his subordinate leaders “because he had already been there” (personal communication, August 29, 2016).

*Sharing in the danger.* Of 15 participants, nine (60%) indicated that *sharing in the danger* is a leadership skill that fosters resilience. As noted in the opening chapter of this study, Clausewitz identified danger as one of the constant sources of friction in military operations (Watts, 2004). Danger is always present on the battlefield (Bartone, 2006). The researcher coded two elements as part of the *share in the danger* theme. Those elements are (1) *lead from the front* and (2) *go to the sound of the guns*.

Among the participants, seven (47%) highlighted the requirement for a commander to *lead from the front*. P15 said that leading from the front means “operating with them and carrying the weight” (personal communication, September 12, 2016). P8 said that he “tried to show them what right looks like” on the battlefield (personal communication, August 29, 2016). P3 described leadership at the front as “showing the dog how to hunt” (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P7 noted that “when fear was high” in his battalion, he personally went on “the most dangerous missions” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P2 summarized leading from the front as showing “a love of the battle” (personal communication, June 20, 2016).

P11 recognized that leadership at the front is not always possible because “your responsibilities are wide-ranging” (personal communication, September 31, 2016). Likewise, P8 understood this challenge, but agreed that “sometimes you need to be there to show shared sacrifice and shared risk” (personal communication, August 29, 2016). Regarding this dilemma, P1 stressed that the “most important decision a battalion commander makes is where he places himself on the battlefield” (personal communication, June 18, 2016).

P4 was one of five participants (33%) that remarked on how important it was for “the commander to *go to the sound of the guns*” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P1 emphasized that “as a leader, you are willing to share the risk” and so “you go to the scene of the fight” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P3 stated, “I can look in the mirror now because I left everything on the field” and that he “gave the enemy plenty of chances to kill me too” (personal communication, June 22, 2016).

*Being calm and confident.* Of 15 participants, seven (47%) indicated that *being calm and confident* on the battlefield is another leadership skill that fosters resilience. This theme contained a single coded element of the same name. P15 noted the requirement “to maintain calm in any situation” by “keeping your cool” (personal communication, September 12, 2016). P9 stated that a leader’s actions should “project calm...all is normal, we will get through this” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P13 described projecting confidence on the battlefield as “being the calm in the storm” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P4 also counseled to “show confidence, show no doubts, show no worries” and “never be the screamer” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P3 discussed his ability to “do just fine in what seemed like an uncontrolled environment” (personal communication, June 22, 2016).

*Keeping subordinates informed.* Of 15 participants, seven (47%) indicated that *keeping subordinates informed* is a leadership skill that fosters resilience. This theme contained a single coded element of the same name. P7 observed that a person “needs to be in control to be resilient and Marines basically have no control” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). Information provides at least a modicum of the control that a person needs. P9 noted that “there is the danger of the unknown, so the more information they have, they know what to expect” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P1 emphasized that “when things are at their worst, you have to be your best and you have to be seen” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P2 recommended that commanders “get down to the fighting level [platoon or smaller units] on their turf” to talk to Marines during combat operations (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P11 also noted the importance of “talking directly to the younger

Marines on their post at the battle positions” and “explaining to them what was going on” (personal communication, September 31, 2016).

**Summary of research question 1.** Research question one asked: What practices do military leaders employ to overcome adversity in their organizations? The researcher designed three interview questions to support this research question. The battalion commanders provided thoughtful and substantial answers to each of the three interview questions.

Interview question 1 asked what practices that battalion commanders employed to overcome adversity during combat operations. The commanders identified *small unit training to build cohesion, creating a positive command climate, and instilling a sense of purpose* as the practices that they employed to overcome adversity in combat. See Table 3 below for themes and associated coded elements for interview question one.

Table 3

*Practices Employed to Overcome Adversity in Combat*

Themes	Coded Elements
Small unit training to build cohesion	Building cohesion takes time Trust and mutual respect Importance of subordinate leaders to building cohesion
Creating a positive command climate	Earn their trust Maintain discipline Treat men with respect Have fun
Instilling a sense of purpose	Importance of having purpose Instilling purpose takes time

Interview question 2 asked the battalion commanders what attributes enabled them to overcome adversity during combat operations. The commanders identified *educated and trained, physically fit, and believes in God* as the attributes that enabled



them to overcome adversity in combat. See Table 4 below for themes and associated coded elements for interview question two.

Table 4

*Personal Attributes for Overcoming Adversity in Combat*

Themes	Coded Elements
Educated and trained	Institutional military training Being well-read on the art and science of war
Physically fit	Need for functional fitness Conducting rigorous physical training Fitness builds tolerance for adversity
Believes in God	Faith provides confidence Command is lonely without faith

Interview question three asked the battalion commanders what leadership skills enabled them to overcome adversity during combat operations. The commanders identified *winning subordinates' affection, demonstrating character, sharing in the danger, being calm and confident, and keeping subordinates informed* as the leadership skills that enabled them to overcome adversity in combat. See Table 5 below for themes and associated coded elements for interview question three.

Table 5

*Leadership Skills for Overcoming Adversity in Combat*

Themes	Coded Elements
Winning subordinate's affection	Show concern Build relationships
Demonstrating character	Moral courage Humility Empathy Honesty
Sharing in the danger	Lead from the front Go to the sound of the guns
Being calm and confident	Being calm and confident
Keeping subordinates informed	Keeping subordinates informed

**Research question 2.** Research question 2 asked: What challenges do military leaders face in implementing those practices employed in overcoming adversity in their organizations? The researcher designed this research question to identify the challenges that military leaders and their subordinates face overcoming adversity in combat and how they address those challenges. The following four interviews questions pertain to research question two:

1. What personal challenges did you face implementing practices to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?
2. How did you overcome those personal challenges during combat operations?
3. What challenges did your organization face overcoming adversity during combat operations?
4. How did your organization overcome those challenges during combat operations?

**Interview question 4.** What personal challenges did you face implementing practices to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?

This study accounts for multiple responses because some participants shared more than one challenge. From the participants' answers to interview question four, two themes emerged (see Figure 4).

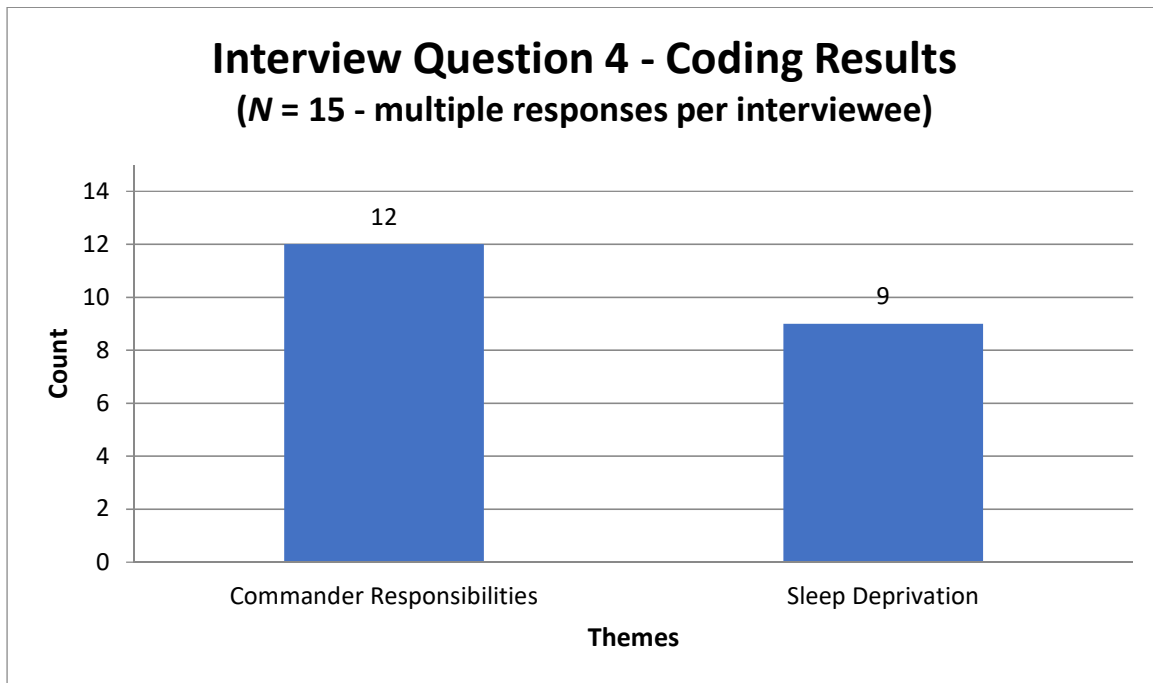


Figure 4. Personal challenges to overcoming adversity in combat.

*Commander responsibilities.* Of 15 participants, 12 (80%) identified *commander responsibilities* as a personal challenge that they faced during combat that caused adversity. In recognition of his responsibilities, P1 observed that there is “no such thing as a bad battalion, only bad battalion commanders” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). The researcher coded two elements as part of the *commander responsibilities* theme. Those elements are (1) *decision-making* and (2) *sending men into harm’s way*.

Among the participants, 10 (67%) indicated *decision-making* was a commander responsibility that caused adversity during combat. As Maddi (2004) explained, each decision a person makes involves choosing an unfamiliar future path, and this creates ontological anxiety through fear of uncertainty and the potential for failure. P9 commented, “making bad decisions was a challenge” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P10 observed commanders are “dealing in an environment of fog and friction” and “despite only having a limited amount of information, a decision is

required” (personal communication, July 31, 2016). P11 remarked, “stuff starts happening and it happens fast” (personal communication, September 31, 2016). P4 noted commanders “are getting paid to make the tough decisions” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P8 recalled thinking, “how can I reinforce the decisions that the guy on scene is going to make?” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P9 stated he tried to “involve more people in the decision-making process” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P14 also pointed out “collective decisions are more well informed” (personal communication, July 24, 2016).

Among the participants, seven (47%) indicated that *sending men into harm’s way* was a commander responsibility that caused adversity during combat. As noted in the literature review, military units confront danger directly with the understanding that there will be significant risk to members of the organization (Hannah et al., 2009). P1 remarked that “causing marines to lose their lives or be injured” was a concern for him and “I didn’t want to fail the men that I was responsible for” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P1 further pointed out, “sometimes you can do everything right and it still goes badly” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P3 recalled the stress of having to “give an order and have people killed or maimed and then having to give it again the next day and the next day” (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P4 remembered thinking, “this guy could die and it would be because of me” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P12 noted that “sending people in when you are expecting casualties is tough” (personal communication, June 21, 2016).

*Sleep deprivation.* Nine of 15 participants (60%) identified *sleep deprivation* as a personal challenge that they faced during combat that caused adversity. As P3 stated,

“it takes an enormous amount of energy” to lead a battalion on the battlefield (personal communication, June 22, 2016). The researcher coded two elements as part of the *sleep deprivation* theme. Those elements are (1) *effects of not enough rest* and (2) *precautions*.

Among the participants, seven (47%) described the *effects of not getting enough rest* on the commander. P12 recalled that he “did not sleep well due to stress and anxiety” (personal communication, June 21, 2016). P8 observed, “when Marines look at you they know if you are tired and if you are tapped out” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P3 stated, “cognitive performance declines without sleep and this builds over time” (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P7 noted, “you must be aware of your own physical limitations” (personal communication, September 14, 2016).

Among the participants, five (33%) recalled the *precautions* they took to prevent sleep deprivation. P12 observed that during combat, “he had to pace himself” (personal communication, June 21, 2016). P7 stated, “you must go down when you tank is empty” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P7 also remembered, “paying attention to his MRE (meals ready to eat) diet” and that supplementing the MREs helped (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P5 pointed out that “it is up to the commander to make sure the men are also getting enough rest” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). Interestingly, P10 noted, “some of the best sleep he got was in combat because he was so exhausted” (personal communication, July 31, 2016).

**Interview question 5.** How did you overcome those personal challenges during combat operations? This study accounts for multiple responses because some

participants shared more than one practice. From the participants' answers to interview question five, three themes emerged (see Figure 5).

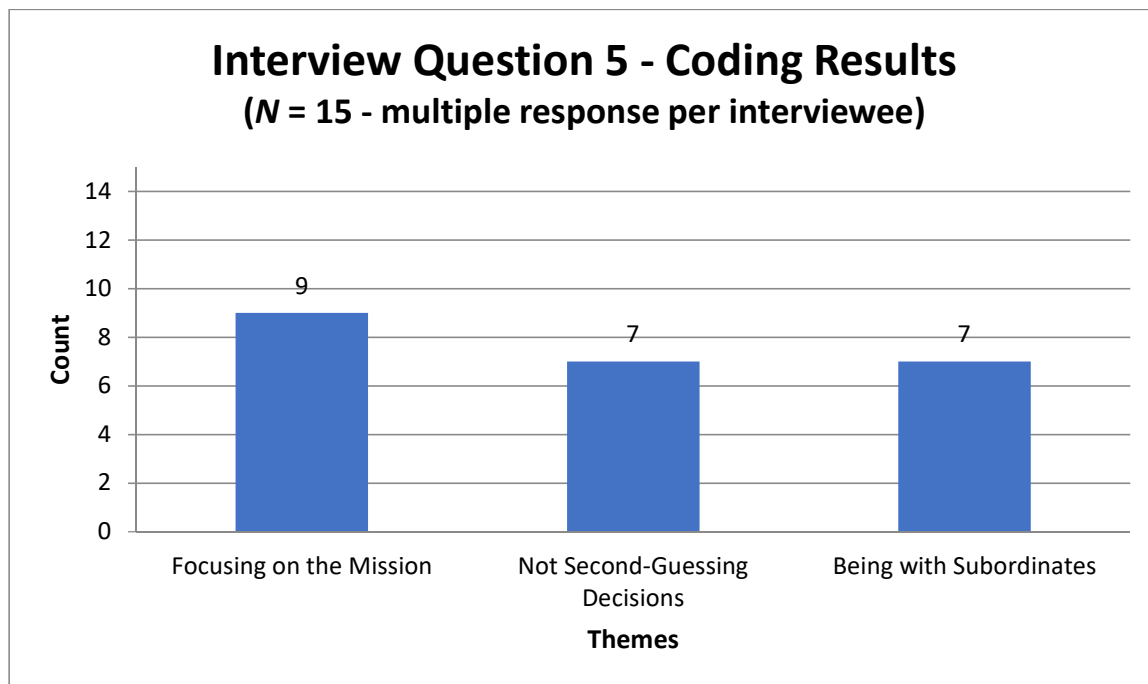


Figure 5. Personal practices used to overcome adversity in combat.

*Focusing on the mission.* Of 15 participants, nine (60%) stated that *focusing on the mission* is one way that they overcame adversity in combat. This theme contained a single coded element of the same name. P14 pointed out, “Marine Corps leaders are trained to think mission first and then Marines” (personal communication, July 24, 2016). P10 recalled the importance of “getting into a battle rhythm” (personal communication, July 31, 2016). Once into a battle rhythm, P4 observed that “momentum is important to overcoming adversity” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P1 remembered thinking, “the best path to survival for any of us was to stay focused on the task at hand” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P14 said, “keeping myself occupied on what I had to do next kept me from wandering into emotions” (personal communication, July 24, 2016).

*Not second-guessing decisions.* Of 15 participants, seven (47%) stated that *not second-guessing decisions* is one way that they overcame adversity in combat. This theme contained a single coded element of the same name. By not second-guessing decisions, military leaders do not exasperate the ontological anxiety described previously by Maddi (2004). P9 stated, “it becomes dangerous if you spend too much time wallowing after setbacks on the battlefield” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P14 admitted that bad decisions were part of the decentralized operating environment, but reminded himself each night that he was making the best decisions possible “based on mission and welfare of Marines” (personal communication, July 24, 2016). P10 refused to second-guess himself on his decisions and accepted the idea that “not all the decisions he made would be the best” (personal communication, July 31, 2016). P11 recommended, “when something bad happens, you work through it and don’t dwell on the past ...you do not let it swim around in your head” (personal communication, September 31, 2016).

*Being with the Marines.* Of 15 participants, seven (47%) stated that *being with the Marines* is one way that they overcame adversity in combat. This theme contained a single coded element of the same name. P13 observed, “leaders take strength from their followers” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P1 recalled that he made sure to get “out and about” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P2 remembered that he “did a lot of driving around” and was “constantly living out there with the young guys” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P3 said that for him, it was “getting around to see the dirty smiling faces kept me going and helped pour off the excess stress” (personal communication, June 22, 2016).

**Interview question 6.** What challenges did your organization face overcoming adversity during combat operations? This study accounts for multiple responses because some participants shared more than one challenge. From the participants' answers to interview question six, two themes emerged (see Figure 6).

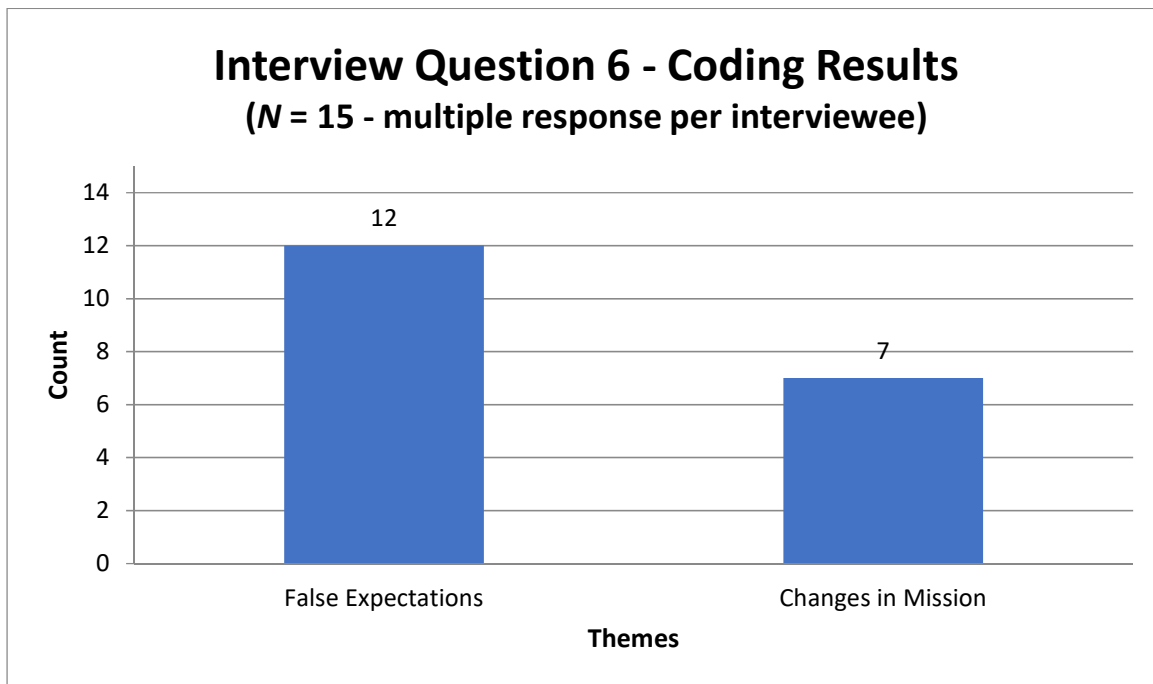


Figure 6. Organizational challenges that caused adversity in combat.

**False expectations.** Of 15 participants, 12 (67%) stated having *false expectations* is a challenge to overcoming adversity that their battalion faced in combat. P5 noted, "you must confront the brutal reality of what you face" (personal communication, September 17, 2016). P3 stated, "you can never eliminate the shock of combat and if the gulf [between expectation and reality] is too big, it is a major traumatic event" (personal communication, June 22, 2016) The researcher coded two elements as part of the *false expectations* theme. Those elements are (1) *casualties* and (2) *killing*.

Among the participants, eight (53%) stated that *casualties* could be a cause of false expectations during combat. Prior research has noted that engaging in direct



combat and seeing peers injured or killed causes stress (Schaubroeck et al., 2011). P2 recalled that it was “a trying time to keep morale up when we were taking casualties” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P5 noted, “once a casualty happens, you know what to do, but [fear of] the unknown causes more stress” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). P9 warned against “rationalizing away that these people are trying to kill us” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P7 remembered at time when “the enemy got ahead of us and the fear was palpable” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). Regarding accidental deaths on the battlefield, P13 said, “the most challenging time is when you have a casualty, particularly when the Marines know that the casualty was preventable” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). Friendly fire casualties are especially difficult. P1 remembered, “my unit came under friendly fire twice...it was horrible...there were plenty of friendly casualties” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P14 recalled posting “pictures of Marines smiling [during their recovery] at Bethesda [Naval Hospital] for the Marines” to help them “get rid of that last memory of the Marine [getting wounded] in their head” (personal communication, July 24, 2016).

Among the participants, seven (47%) stated that *killing* could be a cause of false expectations during combat. In preparation for killing another person, P1 explained “I told them, you’re going to sight in on another man, and you are going to pull that trigger, and when the bullet leaves the barrel, it is going to change both men forever” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P8 pointed out, “they are not the same person again, so you keep him in your crosshairs” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P2 noted, “when these young guys kill somebody that did need killing, they take it very

hard” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P8 also said, “the Marines are even more impacted when they kill an innocent civilian, especially a child...you could see it in their eyes” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P11 questioned, “how do we have these guys do these things and maintain their humanity?” (personal communication, September 31, 2016). P1 explained to his Marines, “I will not judge you on information you did not have at the time that you pulled the trigger...so make it a righteous kill” (personal communication, June 18, 2016).

Once his Marines became accustomed to killing, P2 recalled that his “biggest challenge was having young guys taking [innocent] life and making things worse” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P10 recalled the difficulty he had “changing the mentality of the Marines to go from a kinetic environment into a non-kinetic environment” (personal communication, July 31, 2016). P13 stated “the emphasis on restraint is [also] stressful” (personal communication, July 20, 2016).

*Changes in mission.* Of 15 participants, seven (47%) stated that *changes in mission* were a challenge to overcoming adversity that their battalion faced in combat. Changing missions are a potential source of the ambiguity that Bartone (2006) has previously identified as a battlefield stressor. The researcher coded two elements as part of the *changes in mission* theme. Those elements are (1) *operating disbursed* and (2) *new rules of engagement*.

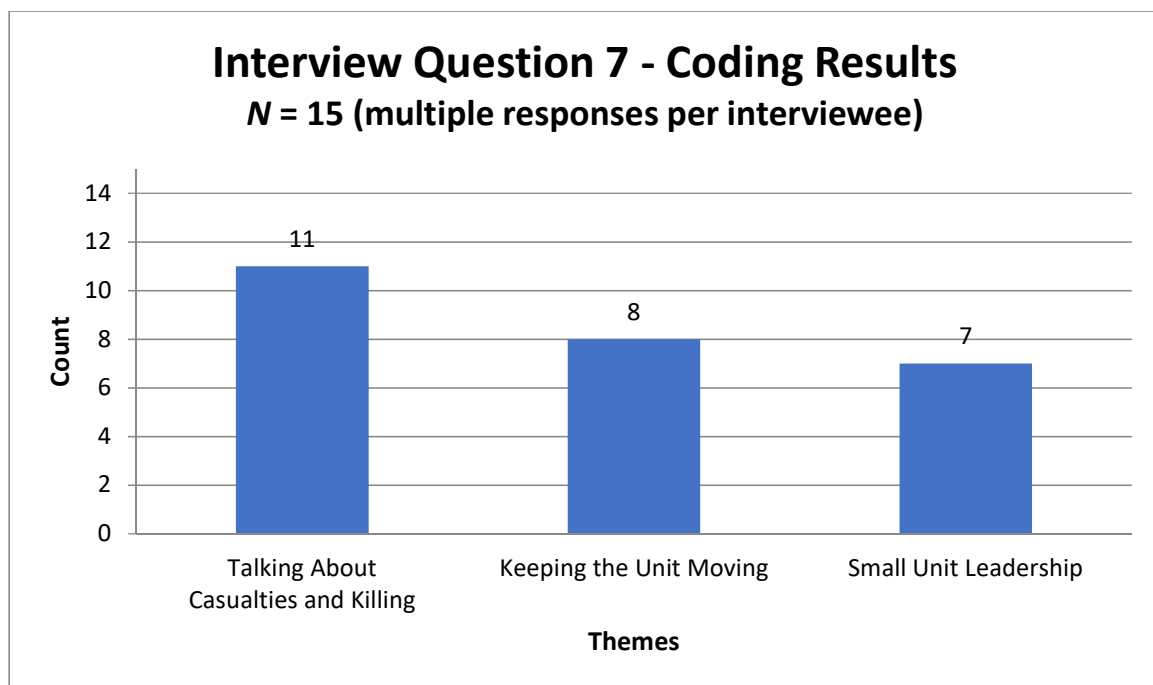
Among the participants, five (33%) stated that *operating disbursed* is an example of changes in mission. P10 observed, “his span of control was stretched when his battalion was spread out” (personal communication, July 31, 2016). P11 stated that when his battalion was operating disbursed, his “junior leaders had to take on greater

responsibility” (personal communication, September 31, 2016). P12 noted that his “companies replaced battalions” and were “spread out all over the place” (personal communication, June 21, 2016). P12 said that because of operating disbursed, his “company commanders absolutely had a battalion commander-like role” and that they “were making decisions and running their battlespace independently” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P14 recalled that during disbursed operations, leaders need to prevent Marines from “going native” or “drifting into a lack of discipline” (personal communication, July 24, 2016).

Among the participants, five (33%) stated that *new rules of engagement* (ROE) are another example of changes in mission. Military authorities establish ROE to guide military personnel and their leaders in the application of deadly force. Scrutiny over whether ROE is being followed sometimes results in official investigations by the military into the conduct of its personnel. Although their Marines understood the need to hold ROE investigations, the commanders noted that these investigations caused additional stress for their Marines. P15 said that the “politics and personalities getting involved [in the investigation] creates even more adversity” (personal communication, September 12, 2016). P7 noted the benefits of the investigations saying, “I brought the investigators in often to protect them, not to prosecute them” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P7 further explained to his Marines that by doing so, “no one will be able to accuse you of doing something wrong years later” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P13 reminded his men, “the ROE was good and we could always defend ourselves and was not alright for a Marine to shoot indiscriminately when he is afraid” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P14 explained that “the problem with a bad

shoot happens at the four-month mark, because after a while, the guy behind the tree looks like a spotter [for ambushes] instead of potentially being a farmer in the wrong place” (personal communication, July 24, 2016).

**Interview question 7.** How did your organization overcome those challenges during combat operations? This study accounts for multiple responses because some participants shared more than one practice for overcoming adversity. Three themes emerged from the participants’ answers to interview question seven (see Figure 7).



*Figure 7.* Organizational practices used to overcome adversity in combat.

*Talking about casualties and killing.* Of 15 participants, 11 (73%) stated that *talking about casualties and killing* helped their battalions overcome adversity during combat? Social support and self-disclosure to trusted and empathetic others help to derive meaning from traumatic events (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). This theme contained a single coded element of the same name. P4 said, “the first time the guys are in the fight, you need to get down there and talk to them, especially if they see the

results of their killing...leaders need to do this and provide some closure” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). After the friendly fire event that killed several of his men, P1 remembered telling his Marines “this is what happened last night, and here’s how it happened, and here’s why it happened, and I can explain this but I can’t explain that, and the fact of the matter is...somebody fucked up” (personal communication, June 18, 2016).

After taking casualties, P9 remembers telling his Marines that “every once in a while, the enemy is going to make a play and connect a pass” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P2 recalled explaining to his Marines that “the loss of life had meaning and was part of a bigger picture” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P41 said it was important that “the chain of command being present after casualties” (personal communication, July 24, 2016). P5 observed that Marines should “vent the stress as soon as you come back in [from a mission] before you go on to something else” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). P7 recalled that after taking casualties, “we did not do an extravagant memorial service” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P5 also noted that “the mourning process is cleansing” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). P1 also said that after taking casualties, ‘you want to pay appropriate respects, but you need to do it quickly’ (personal communication, July 20, 2016).

*Keeping the unit moving.* Of 15 participants, eight (53%) stated that *keeping the unit moving* helped their battalions overcome adversity during combat. This theme contained a single coded element of the same name. P9 stated, “it becomes dangerous if you spend too much time wallowing after setbacks on the battlefield” (personal

communication, September 23, 2016). P13 said that after casualties, “you must get back in the swing of things as quickly as possible” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P1 explained that after a traumatic event, “there was no time to hold hands, you talk about it and say we must move on” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P3 said it was important to “complete the mission and keep moving” (personal communication, June 22, 2016).

After losing several men in one firefight, P4 recalled that “the men took it hard, but they were resilient and shook it off and got back in the fight” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P8 remembered, “I put them back in the fight 24 hours later after the mass casualty that killed 10 and wounded 24 in one IED [improvised explosive device]” (personal communication, September 14, 2016).

*Small unit leadership.* Of 15 participants, seven (47%) stated that *small unit leadership* helped their battalions overcome adversity during combat. This theme contained a single coded element of the same name. As pointed out by Hannah (2012) in the literature review, military leadership provides “the purpose, direction, and motivation required to employ...effective and ethical combat power under intense, dynamic, and dangerous conditions” (p. 14). P7 explained that during combat, “a lot of responsibility gets pushed down” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). Thus, as P9 noted, you must have “good leadership at the lower level” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P10 recalled that his “junior leaders took on much more responsibility” and that his “NCOs stepped up to the challenge” (personal communication, July 31, 2016). Regarding his most junior officers, P15 said that “you

must rely on lower level commanders and expect them to do the same thing you are doing” (personal communication, September 12, 2016).

**Summary of research question 2.** Research question 2 asked: What challenges do military leaders face in implementing those practices employed in overcoming adversity in their organizations? There were four interview questions designed to answer this research question. The battalion commanders provided thoughtful and substantial answers to each of the four interview questions.

Interview question four asked the battalion commanders what challenges they faced overcoming adversity during combat operations. The commanders identified *commander responsibilities* and *sleep deprivation* as the challenges they faced overcoming adversity in combat. See Table 6 below for themes and associated coded elements for interview question four.

Table 6

*Personal Challenges to Overcoming Adversity in Combat*

Themes	Coded Elements
Commander responsibilities	Decision making Sending men into harm’s way
Sleep deprivation	Effects of not getting enough rest Precautions

Interview question 5 asked how the battalion commanders overcame adversity during combat operations. The commanders identified *focusing on the mission, not second-guessing decisions*, and *being with the Marines* as how they overcame adversity in combat. See Table 7 below for themes and associated coded elements for interview question five.

Table 7

*Personal Practices Used to Overcome Adversity in Combat*

Themes	Coded Elements
Focusing on the mission	Focusing on the mission
Not second-guessing decisions	Not second-guessing decisions
Being with subordinates	Being with subordinates

Interview question 6 asked the battalion commanders what challenges their organizations faced overcoming adversity during combat operations. The commanders identified *false expectations* and *changes in mission* as the challenges their organizations faced overcoming adversity in combat. See Table 8 for themes and associated coded elements for interview question 6.

Table 8

*Organizational Challenges That Caused Adversity in Combat*

Themes	Coded Elements
False expectations	Casualties Killing
Changes in mission	Operating disbursed New rules of engagement

Interview question 7 asked the battalion commanders how their organizations overcame adversity during combat operations. The commanders identified *talking about casualties and killing*, *keeping the unit moving*, and *small unit leadership* as how their organizations overcame adversity in combat. See Table 9 below for themes and associated coded element for interview question seven.

Table 9

*Organizational Practices Used to Overcome Adversity in Combat*

Themes	Coded Elements
Talking about casualties and killing	Talking about casualties and killing

(continued)



Themes	Coded Elements
Keeping the unit moving	Keeping the unit moving
Small unit leadership	Small unit leadership

**Research question 3.** Research question 3 asked: How do military leaders measure their success at overcoming adversity in their organizations? The following three interviews questions pertain to research question three:

1. How did you prepare your organization to overcome adversity during combat operations?
2. How did you assess your organization's readiness to overcome adversity during combat operations?
3. How did you measure your organization's success at overcoming adversity during combat operations?

**Interview question 8.** How did you prepare your organization to overcome adversity during combat operations? Keeping in mind that the participants had already identified *small unit training to build cohesion* as a practice that fosters resilience in military organizations, the participants now identified how they conducted that small unit training. Past research indicates that resilience is critical for soldier mission readiness and must be a focus of training (Aude et al., 2014). As noted by Clausewitz in 1832, military personnel and their commanders can counter the negative effects of friction [adversity] through both experience in combat and realistic training for combat (Watts, 2004). This study accounts for multiple responses because some participants shared more than one preparation technique. Three themes emerged from the participants' answers to interview question eight (see Figure 8).

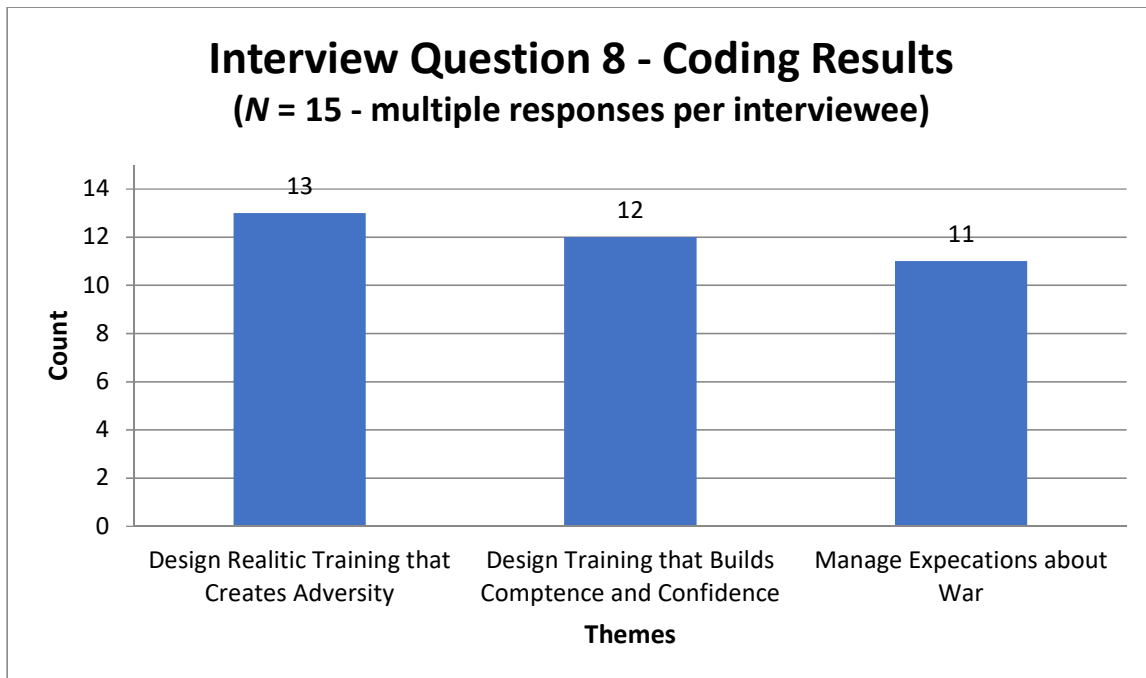


Figure 8. Practices for preparing organizations to overcome adversity in combat.

*Design realistic training that creates adversity.* Of 15 participants, 13 (87%) identified the requirement to *design realistic training that creates adversity* when asked how they prepared their battalions to overcome adversity in combat. Despite best efforts, P12 admitted, “I had a really difficult time building cohesion” because the battalion was “resistant to basic combat training” (personal communication, June 21, 2016). The researcher coded two elements as part of the *design realistic training that creates adversity* theme. Those elements are (1) *combat training should be realistic* and (2) *combat training should create adversity*.

Among the participants, nine (60%) explained that *combat training should be realistic*. Rutter (2006) offered that exposing a person to controlled risk, instead of avoiding risk, may improve resilience. Realistic training exposes military personnel to controlled risk. P2 recalled, “we were always trying to prepare them for the conditions they were going to face” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). Several participants

mentioned the need to immerse combat units in a realistic training environment. For example, P5 stated that “immersion is something we need to figure out how to do all through the training” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). “P6 observed, “realistic training provides mental hardening” in preparation for combat operations (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P9 noted that enemy tactics during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan evolved during the wars; and thus, “realistic training also includes an understanding of how the enemy is actually operating” (personal communication, September 23, 2016).

Among the participants, eight (53%) observed that *combat training should create adversity*. In his explanation of this “steeling effect”, Seery (2011) explained that “just as the body requires exertion to improve fitness, there is no opportunity for toughness to develop if someone has never coped with stress; likewise, physical overexertion can be harmful, and too much stress disrupts toughening” (p. 390). P4 noted, “you want to do hard stressful things just to see if people start cracking” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P5 described using a progressive training plan that “stresses them more and more” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). P11 remarked that realistic training should include “situations where you are in so many tough spots that you likely will fail” (personal communication, September 31, 2016). P8 noted, “it is important that they can recognize these reactions [to adversity] in their buddies” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P14 recalled that “tough and realistic training allowed him to identify a stress case in a key leader” prior to the combat deployment (personal communication, July 24, 2016).

*Design training that builds competence and confidence.* Of 15 participants, 12 (80%) identified the requirement to design training that builds competence and confidence to overcome adversity in combat. As noted in the literature review, confidence acts as a pathway to resilience (Luthans et al., 2006). P5 recalled establishing “challenging training goals for ourselves that we worked up to” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). P13 said, “I tried to make the battalion a learning battalion” and he told his Marines to “teach both their subordinates and their peers” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P9 demanded that his junior officers “share best practices” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P7 said that his training program “built confidence in themselves and the organization” (personal communication, September 14, 2016).

P3 noted his intention to build “tactical prowess” in his battalion because “knowing your business” is a stress reliever (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P15 explained that “being an expert in what we do” gave him confidence (personal communication, September 12, 2016). P10 remembered his battalion having “confidence in their preparation” (personal communication, July 31, 2016). Several participants described building their Marines’ confidence by continuously rehearsing the evacuation of wounded from the battlefield. P1 wanted his men to know, “we will get him off the battlefield and take care of his body with respect” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P2 said it was imperative that the Marines believe that “if they were hit, we would get them out of there” with a “rehearsed system that will get them back” (personal communication, June 20, 2016).

*Manage expectations about war.* Of 15 participants, 11 (73%) discussed the importance of managing expectations about the realities of war. According to the study participants, training the organization to visualize the battlefield is the preferred technique to create realistic expectations. As mentioned in the opening chapter of this study, Clausewitz explained that soldiers on the battlefield will witness “the heart-rending spectacle of the dead and wounded” (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 104). Having false expectations about close combat is a challenge to overcoming adversity in combat. P5 recognized, “it is hard to replicate the threat to body and spirit in training” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). To prepare Marines for the grim reality of the battlefield, P6 described the need to “create a realistic picture in their minds” (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P7 wanted his men to have “some idea of what this was going to look like before we went” (personal communication, September 14, 2016).

P1 characterized visualization as already “moving mentally through this place before we ever got there” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P9 explained that the purpose of visualization was to “survive the first exposure to combat” by lessening the “shock that gets to Marines” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P3 described “building mental shock absorbers to minimize the shock of combat” (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P14 talked about creating “the ability to look at your buddy that might not have legs and then assess and react” (personal communication, July 24, 2016).

***Interview question 9.*** How did you assess your organization’s readiness to overcome adversity during combat operations? This study accounts for multiple

responses because some participants shared more than one assessment technique. From the participants' answers to interview question nine, two themes emerged (see Figure 9).

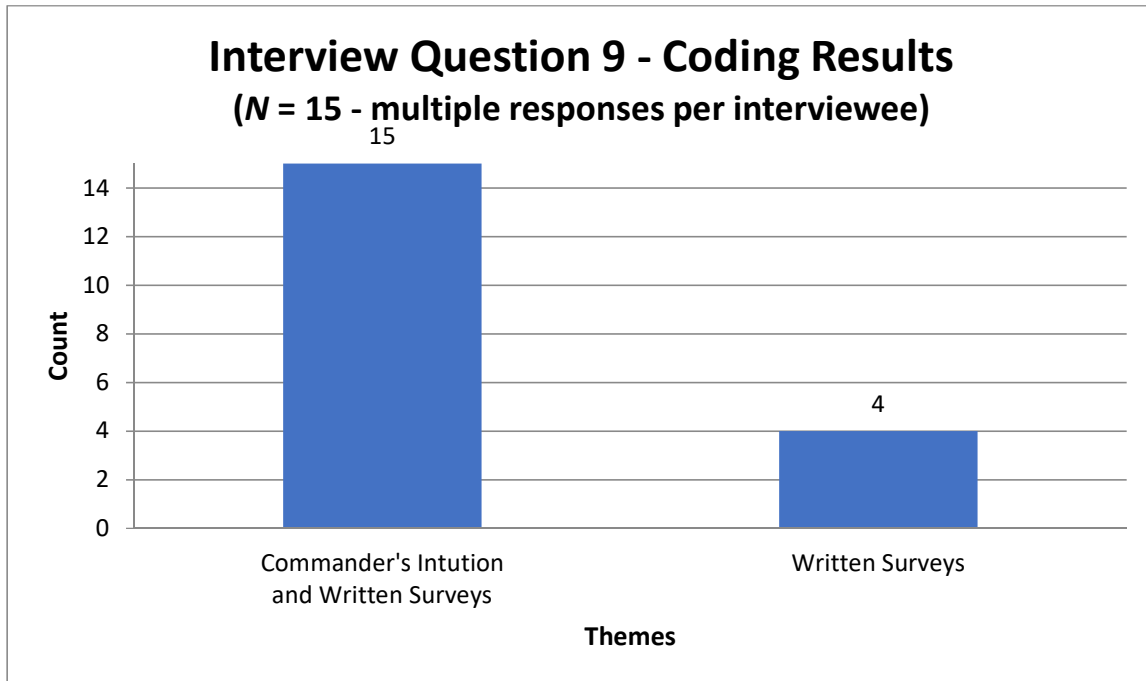


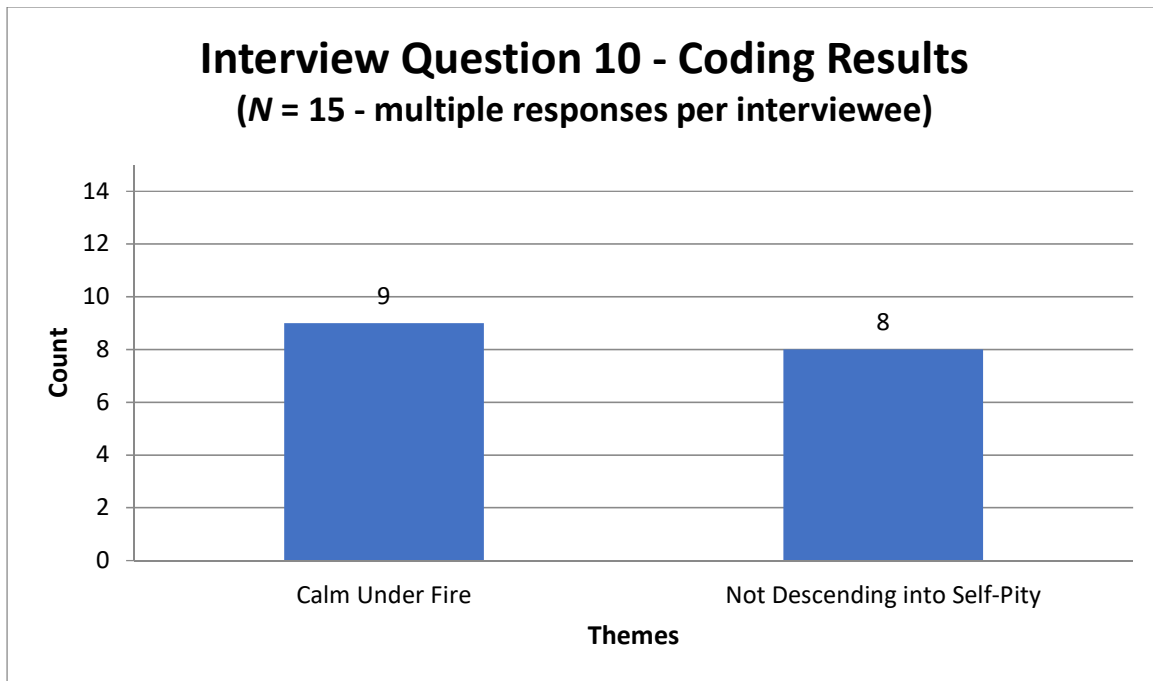
Figure 9. Techniques for assessing readiness to overcome adversity in combat.

*Commander's intuition.* All 15 participants (100%) described using *commander's intuition* to assess the readiness of their battalions to overcome adversity during combat. P15 stated, "there was no empirical way, so commander's ability to know when the unit is clicking" is essential (personal communication, September 12, 2016). P8 observed, "you learn a lot by watching them" (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P6 explained, "you must be there to get a feel for it, there is no report" (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P1 remembered that he looked for "a sense of unit cohesion, that whole sense of family that he could feel and see develop over time" (personal communication, June 18, 2016).

P6 recalled “learning a lot from how the Marines are dealing with adversity after the first look at training” (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P15 stated, “you are looking at the intangibles...the junior leaders are critical” (personal communication, September 12, 2016). P1 recalled assessing “their attitude and demeanor and how they interact with each other” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). P2 wanted to see his Marines “thinking like a team instead of an individual” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P5 watched for a “culture of camaraderie” to develop (personal communication, September 17, 2016). P5 noted his requirement to see “the youngest Marines start demanding the same expectations” of each other (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P12 looked for a sense of unit pride and identity (personal communication, June 21, 2016).

*Written surveys.* Of 15 participants, four (27%) mentioned using *written surveys* to assess the readiness of their battalions to overcome adversity during combat. Per the participants, the U.S. Marine Corps has developed written surveys to specifically assess a unit’s command climate. Members of the unit complete these surveys anonymously and then returned to the unit’s leadership. P15 recalled using command climate surveys “to get some data but I am not sure that it helped me” (personal communication, September 12, 2016). P13 said that he used a survey, but “most people [commanders] do not want to use climate surveys” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P9 stated that he liked peer reviews because “you cannot fool your peers” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). According to P9, peer reviews are the “best indicators of combat performance and leadership according to the Israeli Defense Force” (personal communication, September 23, 2016).

**Interview question 10.** How did you measure your organization’s success at overcoming adversity during combat operations? This study accounts for multiple responses because some participants shared more than one measurement metric. From the participants’ answers to interview question 10, two themes emerged (see Figure 10).



*Figure 10.* Metrics for measuring success at overcoming adversity in combat.

Of 15 participants, nine (60%) identified using *calm under fire* as a measure of success during combat operations. P1 recalled, “a company’s first firefight doesn’t look anything like it’s firefight on day five” (personal communication, June 18, 2016). Likewise, P3 observed, “the first five days is critical and getting past that was a key” (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P5 described the “magic moment” as the men “going from being peacetime Marines and realizing that they are in combat” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). P3 proudly observed that on the “first night of the war, all units were in contact with the enemy, indirect fire was landing all



around the CP [command post], and yet people were talking on the radio calmly” (personal communication, June 22, 2016).

Of 15 participants, eight (53%) identified using *not descending into self-pity* as a measure of success during combat operations. P8 remarked that despite his battalion taking over 20 KIAs [killed in action] during both his deployments, “they did not descend into self-pity” (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P2 knew the adversity of combat was not affecting his Marines when he saw them “clearing the rubble to save the enemy soldier’s lives” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). He later explained that “only a warrior would understand that” (personal communication, June 20, 2016).

**Summary of research question 3.** Research question three asked: How do military leaders measure their success at overcoming adversity in their organizations? The researcher designed three interview questions in support of this research question. The battalion commanders provided thoughtful and substantial answers to each of the three interview questions.

Interview question 8 asked the battalion commander how they prepared their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations. The commanders identified *design realistic training that creates adversity*, *design training that builds competence and confidence* and *manage expectations about war* as how they prepared their organizations to overcome adversity in combat. See Table 10 below for themes and associated coded elements for interview question eight.

Table 10

*Practices for Preparing Organizations to Overcome Adversity in Combat*

Themes	Coded Elements
Design realistic training that creates adversity	Combat training should be realistic Combat training should create adversity
Design training that builds competence and confidence	Design training that builds competence and confidence
Manage expectations about war	Manage expectations about war

Interview question 9 asked the battalion commanders how they assessed their organization's readiness to overcome adversity during combat operations. The commanders identified *commander's intuition* and *written surveys* as how they assessed their organization's readiness to overcome adversity during combat operations. See Table 11 below for themes and associated coded elements for interview question nine.

Table 11

*Techniques for Assessing Readiness to Overcome Adversity in Combat*

Themes	Coded Elements
Commander's intuition	Commander's intuition
Written surveys	Written surveys

Interview question 10 asked the battalion commanders how they measured their organization's success at overcoming adversity during combat operations. Regarding their ability to measure the success of their battalions at overcoming adversity, the commanders identified *calm under fire* and *not descending into self-pity*. See Table 12 below for themes and associated coded elements for interview question 10.

Table 12

*Metrics for Measuring Success at Overcoming Adversity in Combat*

Themes	Coded Elements
Calm under fire	Calm under fire
Not descending into self-pity	Not descending into self-pity

**Research question 4.** Research question four asked: What recommendations would military leaders make to aspiring leaders wanting to overcome adversity in their organizations in the future? The following two interviews questions pertain to research question four:

1. Is there anything that you have learned from your experience in overcoming adversity that you wish you knew prior to your organization's deployment for combat operations?
2. How would you recommend that aspiring military leaders prepare their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations?

**Interview question 11.** Is there anything that you have learned from your experience in overcoming adversity that you wish you knew prior to your organization's deployment for combat operations? Despite their best efforts, all the battalion commanders conceded that at least some of their Marines were not able to overcome combat related adversity completely. P10 observed, "the stress of combat cannot be controlled, they cannot sidestep the events and the stress, the mind and body are naturally going to be challenged (personal communication, July 31, 2016). Likewise, P14 remarked, "let's not wish away the fact that nobody comes back with added stress" (personal communication, July 24, 2016). P5 noted the need for "methods to both ease them into it and ease them out of it" (personal communication, September 17, 2016).

This study accounts for multiple responses because some participants shared more than one lesson learned. From the participants' answers to interview question 11, four themes emerged (see Figure 11).

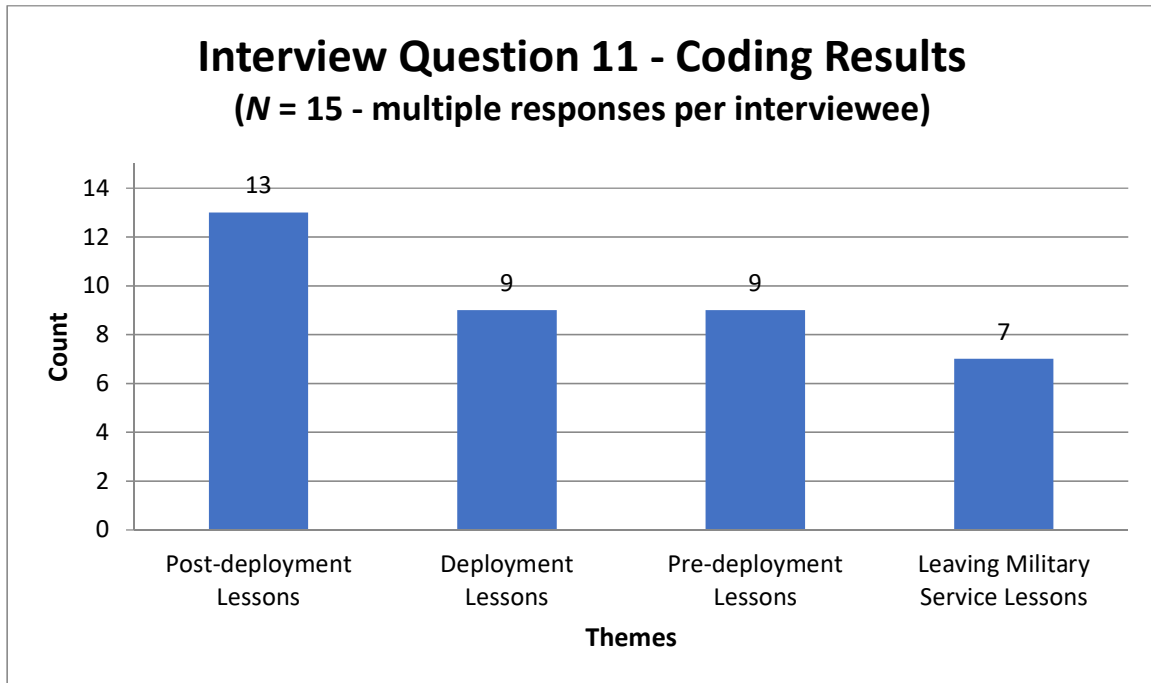


Figure 11. Lessons learned about overcoming adversity in combat.

Of 15 participants, 13 (87%) identified *post-deployment lessons* that they learned about overcoming adversity. The researcher coded three elements as part of the *post-deployment lessons* theme. Those elements are (1) *keeping units together*, (2) *proactive monitoring*, and (3) *get subordinates and their families the help they need*.

Among the participants, eight (53%) talked about the importance of *keeping units together*. Social support is a key enabler for the recognition, prevention, and care of stress (Cacioppo et al., 2011). As noted in the literature review, social support continues as a factor that could prevent mental health problems in U.S. military personnel returning from deployments (Eisen et al., 2014). As discussed in the responses to interview question one, building unit cohesion prior to a deployment helps military

personnel overcome adversity during combat. Many of the commanders also remarked on the importance of cohesion after a combat deployment. P11 recognized that “time with your unit both before and after the deployment is important because guys are taking care of each other (personal communication, September 31, 2016). P3 pointed out that “the unit is a cocoon of people you know and trust” (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P15 noted that “when they are broken, you need the cohesion to handle the broken guys” (personal communication, September 12, 2016). P7 explained that “keeping a guy with PTSD close to the unit worked” (personal communication, September 14, 2016).

Unfortunately, according to P13, “one thing we [the Marine Corps] tend to do wrong is breaking up the units” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P15 recalled that “he was gone in one and half months himself and many of his folks were farmed out” to other units (personal communication, September 12, 2016). On how this negatively impacts the Marines, P4 stated “the most difficult time is coming back and getting separated from your combat family” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P3 explained that “when they leave the unit and go somewhere else, say you go to an adjacent unit with different experiences, even if they have good leadership, it is still somewhat alienating” (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P1 described it this way:

If every Marine has a resiliency cup and it's got eight ounces of resiliency in it. In my cup two ounces might be personal resiliency and six ounces are from my unit. In your cup, maybe five ounces is personal resilience and only three ounces of it you draw from the unit. The Marine whose cup is filled mostly with unit resiliency,

that's where he hangs his heart and his soul, and he falls hard when he has to leave the unit. For the guy that stays with the unit, he still has the bond because he was with you before and during and now he's with you after, so you can still laugh and talk and cry, all those things. But for the guys that have to leave the unit, you promised them that we are in this together and they buy it. And then when you get back you have to say, you know I love you but you have to go.

(personal communication, June 18, 2016)

In the waning years of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, P14 said that the Marine Corps issued "an order to freeze people in place for three months" (personal communication, July 24, 2016).

Among the participants, five (33%) discussed the need for *proactive monitoring* to determine if the men are showing signs of combat related stress. The commanders explained that Marines are reluctant to ask for help with combat related stress issues. According to P6, immediately after returning from war, "Marines would not say anything because they were afraid they could not go home on leave" (personal communication, September 11, 2016). Thus, P6 told his leadership team to "stay in touch with them during the 30-day leave" (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P5 explained how the Marines need to "make meaning of their experience after returning from combat" (personal communication, September 17, 2016). P4 said, "we made sure to let these guys talk about it and let it all hang out" (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P5 emphasized, "you need somebody with experience to help this process" because "you don't want them trying to solve their own problems at the troop level" (personal communication, September 17, 2016).

Among the participants, seven (47%) discussed the commander's requirement to *get subordinates and their families the help they need*. Previous research indicates that interventions aimed at promoting and sustaining resilience after deployment might have the potential to improve the mental health of veterans (Eisen et al., 2014; Pietrzak et al., 2009). P12 observed that combat related stress issues are often complicated by TBI (traumatic brain injury) and alcohol problems (personal communication, June 21, 2016). P13 noted a significant increase in self-referral to his installation's alcohol treatment program (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P14 explained his leadership policy of personally tracking the individual Marines' "get well plans" (personal communication, July 24, 2016). P14 also mentioned,

On the back side, there were a lot of hurting families. We need programs to help the wives deal with husbands that were now different. We should be doing something for them as a support network and it's pragmatic because it helps the Marines as well. When they are back, the frustrations and real feelings come out at home as the Marines come out of one storm and into another. (personal communication, July 24, 2016)

Of 15 participants, nine (60%) identified *deployment lessons* that they learned about overcoming adversity. The researcher coded two elements as part of the *deployment lessons* theme. Those elements are (1) *recognizing stress problems in the combat zone* and (2) *prevention and care in the combat zone*.

The commanders explained that most of the Marines they took to war did not have any issues overcoming the adversity of combat. However, seven participants (47%) did discuss their experience with *recognizing stress problems in the combat*

*zone*: P9 stated, “you never know how someone is going to react until you get there” (personal communication, September 23, 2016). P3 observed, “some folks will be naturally more resilient than others” (personal communication, June 22, 2016). P14 stated, “some guys that ended up having problems, you never would have known or expected it” (personal communication, July 24, 2016). P4 recalled that often “the quiet guys take stress better and the bravado guys crack” (personal communication, September 16, 2016). P9 was glad to say “the guy I was worried about the most, understood the most and led his Marines the best” (personal communication, September 23, 2016).

Among the participants, five (33%) discussed their efforts for *prevention and care in the combat zone*. P7 talked about his policy of “making everyone at a combat be seen by a corpsman because guys were getting hurt [both physically and mentally] and not telling anyone (personal communication, September 14, 2016). P12 recalled that some of his senior enlisted personnel “were in full-fledged denial of their stress problems” (personal communication, June 21, 2016).

The commanders noted that it was not only their infantry Marines that experience combat related stress issues. For example, P6 pointed out “we had truck drivers getting PTSD because they were expecting to be hit by an IED” (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P14 recalled in the latter years of the war, “we knew by now that getting them right back into the fight was not the answer and that there was a capability on Camp Leatherneck [in Afghanistan] to provide mental health services” (personal communication, July 24, 2016).



Of 15 participants, nine (60%) identified *early detection lessons* that they learned about overcoming adversity. As noted in the literature review, some character traits negatively correlate to resilience and hardiness. Skomorovsky and Stevens (2013) recommended that the military recruit personnel with lower neuroticism because neuroticism helps explain the variance in resilience among military personnel. Another study by identified cynicism and emotional exhaustion as relating negatively to hardiness (Lo Bue, Taverniers, Mylle, & Euwema, 2013). The researcher coded three elements as part of the *early detection lessons* theme. Those elements are (1) *recognizing problems during pre-deployment training*, (2) *recognizing problems during boot camp*, and (3) *identifying childhood issues*.

Among the participants, seven (47%) talked about the need to *recognize problems during pre-deployment training*. P14 recommended looking for Marines “with subtle indicators or that exhibited symptoms” (personal communication, July 24, 2016). P11 recalled that in the later years of the war, “the point was starting to get out that if you see a red flag [signs of stress] to let somebody know” (personal communication, September 31, 2016). P12 noted that during his deployment as a battalion commander, “his experience with PTSD in previous units helped him deal with these issues” (personal communication, June 21, 2016). P8 explained that identifying Marines that are starting to have issues is difficult because “just like Lombardi said, the good ones play hurt, and that includes mentally hurt” (personal communication, September 14, 2016).

Among the participants, three (20%) noted that *recognizing problems during boot camp* could prevent combat related stress issues later. P13 recommended, “if we look back to boot camp and recruiting, susceptibility to stress needs addressed along the

continuum, and the earlier the better” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P12 insisted that regarding his Marines with combat related stress issues, “a lot of these guys had previous medical problems going back to boot camp” (personal communication, June 21, 2016).

Among the participants, three (20%) expressed their opinions about *identifying childhood issues* that might negatively impact a Marine’s ability to overcome stress. Because of problems during their childhood, P13 believes that “people are predisposed to have problems with stress” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). According to P13, “in each instance of PTSD in my experience, there was some underlying factor that was present before they came into the military” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P6 also affirmed his belief that “some Marines have PTSD from their youth” (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P2 adamantly stated,

Character makes all the difference in the world. And that is established by their parents. The further we get away from the family, the missing fathers and so on, and too many video games. If you trace them [Marines with combat related stress issues] back to childhood, I bet his father wasn’t there and he never established the foundation of being a man. (personal communication, June 20, 2016)

Of 15 participants, seven (47%) identified *leaving military service lessons* about overcoming adversity. The researcher coded three elements as part of the *leaving military service* theme. Those elements are (1) *transitioning out of the service*, (2) *problems reentering society*, and (3) *veterans and the disability system*.

Among the participants, four (27%) offered their thoughts on *transitioning out of the service* soon after returning from war. P13 recalled that he had “guys that were on their way out within 30 days” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P2 stated, “PTSD manifests after we send these guys home and they don’t have the organization behind them” (personal communication, June 20, 2016). P5 characterized the problem as “Marines go back carrying this baggage still” (personal communication, September 17, 2016).

Other commanders found fault with how the military prepares its personnel to transition out of the service. Having now retired and speaking from experience, P13 stated,

The military has done harm to itself. We have created a notion in the civilian community that all veterans need help. Now, employers do not want to take a chance on veterans, especially in an economic downturn. We need to stop acting as if everyone has a problem coming out of the service. I personally believe that the hardening of combat makes us stronger and that is completely lost on the civilian community. (personal communication, July 20, 2016)

P8 described similar thoughts on the topic of transition. According to him,

We have got to stop telling everybody that they are heroes and then sending them back to the world with the wrong expectations. The problem is, they still can’t lay the prom queen and nobody is giving them a job. And so, they go to the local bar looking for validation and pretty soon nobody wants to hear their shit anymore. And so, it leaves the Marine thinking...I went to the toughest places in Iraq and I can’t get a job and I can’t get a date with Sally. If what I did can’t get

me a seat at the table in this life, there is nothing else I can do. (personal communication, September 14, 2016)

Among the participants, six (40%) identified that some Marines have *problems reentering society*. P13 said, “young Marines quickly realize that the standard ‘thank you for your service’ is just talk” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). As P13 was making his transition to civilian society, he found out that “nobody cares who you are” (personal communication, July 20, 2016). P3 described the issue as, “the Marine finds himself immersed in a society that is completely different” (personal communication, June 22, 2016). He goes on to say,

The veteran comes home and people are clueless because it hasn’t touched their lives. The veteran feels alienated because nobody gets him. They [society] may sympathize, but there is no way that they can empathize. Marines are wired to connect emotionally. While you are still in the service, you don’t even have to talk about it because everybody gets you. (personal communication, June 22, 2016)

Among the participants, three (20%) called out their personal experiences with Department of Veterans Affairs. Reflecting on his own frustrations, P5 explained that “when you have a stress or anxiety issue, you start looking for reasons to walk out and get angry, so the caretakers need to be aware of this, because we are looking for reasons cast aspersions on the VA” (personal communication, September 17, 2016). Likewise, P6 stated that “when you get stupid answers out of the VA, you are going to try handle it on your own” (personal communication, September 11, 2016). P2 claimed, “the VA system is destroying these guys” (personal communication, June 20, 2016).

According to him, “our disability system encourages them to stay sick and have no sense of value or worth” and instead we all should be helping them “to replicate that purpose filled life” that they left behind (personal communication, June 20, 2016).

**Interview question 12.** The researcher asked participants what recommendations they would make to aspiring military leaders wanting to prepare their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations. The battalion commanders uniformly stated that they recommend aspiring commanders implement the practices for overcoming adversity and leadership skills identified by interview questions one and three. The additional recommendations offered by each of the battalion commanders are as follows:

- P1 said, “Marines don’t expect you to be perfect, they just expect you to be consistent”. He also proclaimed that “resiliency in combat is directly linked to what you do before you ever get there” (personal communication, June 18, 2016).
- P2 declared, “the most important thing is the fighting spirit of the Marines” (personal communication, June 20, 2016).
- P3 admonished, “leadership is all about creating belief” in a common purpose (personal communication, June 22, 2016).
- P4 insisted that if the Marines “don’t feel like they are winning, then they are losing.” According to him, ensuring that the Marines never feel that way is the “prima facia role of the battalion commander” (personal communication, September 16, 2016).

- P5 provided the following advice,

When I became a Battalion Commander, I initially tried to play the heroic bravado role. And then I learned along the way not to do that because some of that image that I put on was not authentic for me. It was canned, so it came off wrong. Bravado talk is not needed and certainly should not be part of what an officer does. (personal communication, September 17, 2016)

- P6 recommended that new commanders “think about how do you build in the answers to the adversity early with proper training and education for those that will be expected to lead” (personal communication, September 11, 2016).
- P7 recalled, “there was no switch to flip, you must be yourself all the time” (personal communication, September 14, 2016).
- P8 noted that while it may come as a surprise to some, “the model of servant leadership is applicable” (personal communication, August 29, 2016).
- P9 advised future commanders “not treat the Marines like victims” after they return from war. He also wanted them to know that “risk averse training prevents realistic training” (personal communication, September 23, 2016).
- P10 said he would tell them, “The more immersive style training you can do the better. What they smell, what they hear, what they see. These aspects will trigger the responses that we are looking for so that we can assess readiness” (personal communication, July 31, 2016).

- P11 said that he believes “there is a growing and a hardening after adversity” after the Marines experience the adversity of the battlefield (personal communication, September 31, 2016).
- P12 stated “There is a balance. We don’t want people to have an out, but if somebody is showing signs of stress” we should send them home early from war (personal communication, June 21, 2016).
- P13 said he would assure commanders that “when we push leadership responsibility down, we are inoculating them against adversity” (personal communication, July 20, 2016).
- P14 insisted, “a strong battalion is great, but strong companies are better, and strong platoons are even better” (personal communication, July 24, 2016).
- P15 wanted them to know, “the quicker you can get your [leadership] team together before you deploy, the better” (personal communication, September 12, 2016).

**Summary of research question 4.** Research question four asked: What recommendations would military leaders make to aspiring leaders wanting to overcome adversity in their organizations in the future? There were two interview questions designed to answer this research question. The battalion commanders provided thoughtful and substantial answers to each of the two interview questions.

Interview question 11 asked the battalion commanders to identify anything that they have learned about overcoming adversity during their deployments to combat. The commanders identified *post-deployment lessons*, *deployment lessons*, *early detection*

*lessons, and leaving military service lessons.* See Table 13 below for themes and associated coded elements for interview question 11.

Table 13

*Lessons Learned About Overcoming Adversity in Combat*

Themes	Coded Elements
Post-deployment lessons	Keeping units together Proactive monitoring Get subordinates and their families the help they need
Deployment lessons	Recognizing stress problems in the combat zone Prevention and care in the combat zone
Early detection lessons	Recognizing problems during pre-deployment training Recognizing problems during boot camp Identifying Childhood issues
Leaving military service	Transitioning out of the service Problems reentering society Disability system and veterans

Interview question 12 asked what recommendations the battalion commanders would make to aspiring military leaders wanting to prepare their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations. The battalion commanders uniformly stated that they recommend aspiring commanders implement the practices for overcoming adversity and leadership skills identified by interview questions one and three. Some additional remarks provided by the participants were also provided.

### **Summary of Chapter Four**

This chapter provided demographic information and deployment timeframes for the 15 participants that agreed to take part in this study. How and when the data was collected from the participants was also discussed. An overview of the data analysis process followed. Data display procedures were explained with a restatement of the four research and twelve interview questions. Lastly, the results of the data collection were presented with supporting charts and graphs. It should be noted that the complete



data collection results found here might also be of use to other researchers conducting research on a related phenomenon.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The conclusions presented here are a synthesis of the data collected from the study participants. The researcher analyzed the data and developed structural descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation. In total, these structural descriptions convey the essence of the study participant's lived experience of overcoming adversity in military organizations.

### **Summary of the Study**

Bartone (2006) has previously argued that military leaders can influence how members of their units make sense of, interpret, and understand operational stress. He hypothesized that hardy leaders could, by example, encourage their followers to have hardy interpretations of stressful experiences (Bartone, 2006). Sinclair and Britt (2013) also asserted that leader behaviors can influence the ability of military personnel to exhibit positive adaptation to significant adversity. The results of this study provide support for those assertions. The conclusions here suggest that military leaders can and do foster resilience in their organizations.

### **Results and Discussion of Findings**

The purpose of this research study was to identify leadership strategies and practices for fostering resilience in military organizations. This entailed determining what challenges military leaders face in implementing practices aimed at fostering resilience. Also examined was how military leaders measure success at fostering resilience. Finally, this study considered what recommendations military leaders would make to aspiring leaders wanting to foster resilience in their own organizations in the future.

Collectively, the following practices (Appendix E) can enable a *culture of resilience* in a military organization.

This study suggests that there are three foundational practices for fostering resilience in military organizations:

1. Build cohesion in the organization by conducting small unit training
2. Create a positive command climate in the organization
3. Instill a sense of purpose in the organization

This study suggests that there are five pre-deployment practices for fostering resilience in military organizations:

1. Demonstrate character to subordinates
2. Win the affection of subordinates
3. Design training for the organization that builds competence and confidence
4. Design realistic training for the organization that creates adversity
5. Have subordinates visualize the battlefield

This study suggests that there are eight deployment practices for fostering resilience in military organizations:

1. Share in the danger with subordinates
2. Be calm and confident on the battlefield
3. Focus on the mission
4. Do not second-guess decisions
5. Talk about the casualties and killing
6. Keep the unit moving after casualties and killing

7. Keep subordinates informed
8. Empower small unit leaders

**Results and discussion of research question 1.** Research question 1 asked:

What current practices do military leaders employ to overcome adversity in their organizations? All the study participants agreed that for a military organization to overcome adversity in combat, the unit commander must build resilience in the organization prior to the combat deployment. The first interview question asked the study participants what practices they employed to overcome adversity during combat operations. The results of this study suggest that the following three practices can foster resilience in a military organization:

1. Small unit training to build cohesion
2. Creating a positive command climate
3. Instilling a sense of purpose

Combat training is the factor that decisively binds military groups together (King, 2006). This study further suggests that the primary practice employed to overcome adversity in military organizations is *small unit training* specifically. Military units conduct small unit tactical training in preparation for combat operations. Small unit training requires military personnel to work in teams. Teamwork enables social resilience, or the capacity to overcome adversity by working with other people (Cacioppo et al., 2011). Social resilience then manifests as unit cohesion in the military organization.

Primary group cohesion is about trust among group members and the capacity for teamwork (Siebold, 2007). This study confirms that trust and mutual respect are indeed the primary components of unit cohesion. In a military unit, being able to rely on

the person to your left and right builds trust. Having trust in your teammates is what enables teamwork. Without trust, effective teamwork is not possible. Teamwork therefore, serves as a measure of trust and mutual respect. A four-step process for building cohesion via small unit training emerges:

1. Small unit training builds trust and mutual respect amongst peers.
2. Trust and mutual respect enables the teamwork that small unit training requires.
3. Teamwork enables social resilience which is the capacity to overcome adversity by working with other people.
4. Social resilience manifests as unit cohesion which in turn fosters resilience.

The primary challenge that military leaders face when building unit cohesion is not having sufficient time to train the unit prior to deployment. As already noted, small unit training is the primary means of building cohesion in a military organization. According to the participants in this study, the Marine Corps typically allows for a six-month cycle of training prior to a combat deployment. All the study participants described this six months of training as barely sufficient to build unit cohesion. Now that the military services are in the wake of Iraq and Afghanistan wars, they should review their deployment schedule policies to determine if it is possible to increase the time allotted for future pre-deployment training of combat units.

The time challenge just described is routinely complicated by the joining of new personnel to combat units during an already too-short training cycle. The integration of new personnel into existing teams is certain to disrupt group dynamics, at least temporarily. As noted by Siebold (2007), primary group cohesion includes both peer and

leader bonding. The participants of this study noted that the joining of senior enlisted and officers late in a training cycle is especially detrimental to the establishment of unit cohesion. The military services should review their personnel assignment policies to determine if solutions are available that will eliminate or mitigate these challenges.

The second practice that military leaders can employ in their organizations to overcome adversity is creating a positive command climate. Meredith et al. (2011) previously identified command climate as being one of the organizational factors that influences resilience in the military. This study suggests that the primary means of creating a positive command climate in a military organization are:

1. Earn subordinates' trust
2. Maintain discipline
3. Treat men with respect
4. Have fun

Sweeney et al. (2009) found that military personnel who trust their leaders are more willing to accept the influence of those leaders. This study suggests that earning subordinates' trust is indeed the most significant contributor to positive command climate. Military personnel should have faith and confidence in their leaders, particularly in combat. Making personal contact and communicating effectively with subordinates are essential to a military leader's ability to earn trust. Earning the trust of military subordinates also includes earning the trust of the subordinates' families, especially spouses. Military leaders should meet collectively, on more than one occasion, with the spouses of their subordinates during the pre-deployment training cycle. It is imperative

that military spouses have trust and confidence in the leaders that will be responsible for the safety and well-being of their loved ones during a combat deployment.

Regarding the maintenance of discipline in military organizations, leaders must set expectations for behavior and performance and then demand that everyone in the organization adhere to those expectations. Leaders should be exemplars of discipline. Accountability is the key to maintaining discipline in military organizations. For discipline to be effective, non-commissioned officers must commit themselves to holding themselves and others accountable. At the same time, leaders should temper unit discipline by treating their subordinates with appropriate respect. The participants of this study explained that young people in the military today expect respectful treatment. Younger military personnel, especially younger non-commissioned officers, appreciate it when their leaders show respect for their opinions and contributions. Proper discipline ensures that once a leader decides on a course of action, subordinates support that decision earnestly despite any opposition or apprehensions that they may have harbored initially. Military leaders should seek opportunities to provide their young non-commissioned officers with a sense of ownership in the organization.

The establishment of sound discipline does not preclude having fun. Pre-deployment training for combat, while certainly a serious undertaking, can also be fun. Appropriate humor, inserted during an otherwise stressful situation, can allow military personnel to relax. Competitive training, in addition to encouraging higher levels of performance, is also a means for having fun. Military personnel will work long and hard during pre-deployment training for an opportunity to secure bragging rights over their comrades. Once deployed to combat, it is even possible to find respectful humor in

unlikely places on the battlefield. The ability to see at least some humor during combat can provide fond remembrances of an otherwise deadly serious experience.

The third practice that military leaders can employ in their organizations to overcome adversity is instilling a sense of purpose. This finding is significant because previous studies about military resilience have not identified having purpose as an organizational factor that influences resilience. It is important for military personnel to know that their government sanctions their wartime efforts and that the American people support them. Fighting to protect national interests is a noble cause that provides an adequate sense of purpose for military personnel. However, if the war drags on, and the strategy for winning the war appears misguided or public support for the war fades, the original purpose of fighting for the nation becomes less valid. If this initial purpose for going to war becomes questionable, leaders must rely solely on military ethos and martial virtue (Jennings & Hannah, 2011) to provide a purpose for fighting.

It is also important that military personnel believe that the war is winnable. Fighting for a lost cause negates any sense of purpose and is certain to create levels of adversity that are even more difficult to overcome. It seems unreasonable to expect that military leaders can foster enough resilience in their organizations to overcome the adversity of fighting for a lost cause. Fighting without a sense of purpose may have a significant negative impact on the ability of military personnel to make any meaning out of their combat experiences when they return to civilian life. This may well explain the difficulties facing so many Vietnam veterans. Veterans should feel that their military service during wartime served a purpose. They should especially feel that the war's purpose justified the inevitable loss of life that comes with war.



The next interview question asked the study participants which personal attributes enabled them to overcome adversity during combat operations. Some experts consider resilience to be an individual trait that is fixed and stable while others consider resilience to be dynamic and changeable over time (Lee et al., 2013). The leadership literature uses the terms trait and attribute interchangeably. The trait perspective guided most leadership research until the middle of the 20th century. Based on scholarly reviews that questioned the efficacy of the trait perspective, many researchers abandoned the trait-based study of leadership. However, additional research conducted in the 1980s showed that the refutation of trait-based leadership models lacked satisfactory empirical grounding (Zaccaro, 2007). The results of this study suggest that the following three attributes enable military leaders to personally overcome adversity during combat operations:

1. Educated and trained
2. Physically fit
3. Belief in God

The identification of these three attributes as enablers in the process of overcoming adversity provides support for the idea that the resilience process begins at a point of biopsychospiritual homeostasis (Richardson, 2002). In this case, homeostasis refers to the stable state of equilibrium between the interdependent elements of mental, physical, and spiritual well-being.

There is a positive relationship between efficacy and resilience (Lee et al., 2013). The pursuit of expert knowledge is an intrinsic factor that motivates military leaders (Kolditz, 2005; Snider, 2012). Professional education and training for military leaders

includes both institutional training provided by the military services and additional self-study reading on the topic of war. When the nation is not at war, military units are busy training for war. Institutional training, conducted by military schools and units, ensures that individuals and units are competent on the battlefield. Just as importantly however, military training also provides the individual service member with confidence in themselves, their unit, and their leaders. Self-study reading about war adds additional competence and confidence. Self-study reading about war is a necessary augment to institutional training for military leaders. Reading about war can specifically help leaders understand the nature of war and the many causes of adversity on the battlefield. Reading about military history and combat is about as close as one can get to actual combat experience without being there. The combination of competence and confidence provided by military training and self-study reading enables military personnel, especially leaders, to overcome adversity in combat.

There is a causal relationship between fitness and resilience (Meredith et al., 2011). Military personnel should approach physical fitness with the same sense of seriousness that professional athletes do. Military fitness training should be both functional and rigorous. Functional fitness training seeks to accurately replicate the demands of the combat environment on the battlefield. For example, building strength to carry heavy combat loads over significant distances. The intent of rigorous physical training is to build the endurance needed for continuous combat operations lasting weeks or even months. In addition to providing aerobic, anaerobic, and strength benefits, military physical training also builds a tolerance for adversity by conditioning both the body and the mind to push beyond previously established limits without

quitting. Physical fitness not only encourages resilience, physical fitness is indeed a requirement for overcoming adversity in combat.

Spirituality is a factor that contributes to resilience (Connor & Davidson, 2003; Peterson et al., 2011). Several of the participants in this study were eager to name their belief in the Christian God as a factor that contributed to their personal resilience. Active duty military officers rarely discuss their personal religious beliefs. However, since these study participants have since retired from active duty, some were willing to talk about the importance of their religious beliefs. Belief in God, or another higher power, can provide military leaders with additional confidence to lead men into battle. Praying to God, or any other form of appropriate dialogue with a higher power, can provide a sense not being alone with command responsibilities.

The final interview question supporting research question one asked what leadership skills enabled the study participants to overcome adversity during combat operations. The study participants noted that their demonstration of these leadership skills also enabled their subordinates across the organization to overcome adversity in combat. The results of this study suggest that the five leadership skills that enable military leaders and their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations are:

1. Winning subordinates' affection
2. Demonstrating character
3. Sharing in the danger
4. Being calm and confident
5. Keeping subordinates informed

Military leaders can win their subordinate's affection by showing genuine concern and building relationships with them. Genuine concern means having much more than a grudging appreciation or even sincere respect for subordinates. Genuine concern, as described by the participants in this study, approximates the love that a parent feels for their children. Despite concerns to the contrary, relationships between military leaders and their subordinates can be both personal and professional at the same time. The family analogy is applicable as well to building relationships. In the same way that a parent tries not to show favoritism to one child over another, so too must the military leader be careful to "love" all his or her subordinates equally. Military leaders should strive to "get to know" their subordinates on a personal level. Not every decision that a military leader makes is going to be popular. This is especially true in a combat situation. Shared affection enables leaders to overcome the adversity that comes with making and enforcing tough decisions. Shared affection enables subordinates to overcome the adversity that comes with following orders without question.

Character strengths boost the psychological functioning that personal adaptation to adversity requires (Boermans et al., 2012). The results of this study suggest that demonstrating the following character traits fosters resilience in military organizations:

1. Moral Courage
2. Honesty
3. Humility
4. Empathy

Moral courage in combat can take several forms. Applying the laws of land warfare uniformly and justly requires moral courage. For example, military leaders routinely

confront the issues of military necessity, distinction, and proportionality on the battlefield. Military necessity refers to attacking only legitimate military targets that are necessary to defeat the enemy. Distinction refers to distinguishing civilians from combatants on the battlefield and taking reasonable steps to ensure their safety. Proportionality refers to using only the force necessary to achieve the military results required to accomplish the mission. For military leaders, moral courage also includes putting your unit and your mission above yourself. In the simplest of terms, it means doing the right thing just because it is the right thing to do. The demonstration of moral courage by leaders fosters resilience in military organizations.

Humility is another specific character strength of leaders that fosters resilience. Humility in the military is about being introspective and admitting when there are problems. Humility is the lack of hubris and the willingness to listen to others. Humility is recognizing that you may not have all the answers all the time. Honesty is another specific character strength of leaders that fosters resilience. In the military, honesty is not just about telling the truth. Honesty in the military is also about being authentic. The inordinate amount of time that military personnel spend with each other during combat operations quickly exposes behaviors that are not authentic. Military leaders should present their authentic selves to their subordinates well prior to a combat deployment. Military leaders must also keep in mind that a reputation for honesty may take months to build but only minutes to destroy. Empathy is the fourth specific character strength of leaders that fosters resilience according to the participants in this study. Military leaders should have a sincere appreciation for the work that their subordinates are doing. One way to gain a full understanding of the challenges that subordinates face is to

occasionally share in their burdens. Working alongside of subordinates from time to time keeps military leaders grounded. The demonstration of empathy by leaders fosters resilience in military organizations. Collectively, the demonstration of moral courage, honesty, humility, and empathy constitute an essential military leadership skill that fosters resilience in military organizations.

Military leaders are willing to share risks with their subordinates in combat (Kolditz, 2005). It is important for military personnel to know that their leaders are willing to share in that danger with them. Leading from the front in the military is about the leader being at those places most likely to make enemy contact. Leading from the front shows a willingness to share in the danger with subordinates. Once the unit becomes engaged with the enemy, the leader of the unit should make every attempt to “go to the sound of the guns”. However, as military leaders gain rank and assume command of larger units, their responsibilities become more wide-ranging. As the participants of this study pointed out, based on their experiences leading infantry battalions, it is not always possible to lead from the front of a large unit. Therefore, one of the most important decisions that a military leader makes is where to place himself or herself on the battlefield. When military leaders share in the danger with their subordinates, it fosters resilience in military organizations.

Military personnel will experience powerlessness and ambiguity in the combat environment (Bartone, 2006). The battlefield is an uncontrollable environment and the resulting lack of control is a significant source of adversity. Although military leaders can exert some control over the actions of their own personnel and units, they cannot control the actions of the enemy. Despite having limited control, military leaders must

maintain personal calm through the chaos of combat. In doing so, military leaders project confidence and engender calm in their subordinates. Military leaders can also mitigate the loss of control that military personnel experience during combat operations by providing them with information. Fear of the unknown can be palpable. Not knowing what to expect is a source of adversity. Having at least some information provides a measure of control. Military leaders should keep their personnel informed. Providing information personally is most effective. When military leaders remain calm and confident in combat and keep their subordinates informed, they foster resilience in their military organizations.

**Research question 1 summary.** Research question 1 asked: What current practices do military leaders employ to overcome adversity in their organizations? Military leaders build resilience in their organizations prior to a combat deployment. This study suggests that small unit training to build cohesion, creating a positive command climate, and instilling a sense of purpose are three practices that foster resilience in military organizations. Trust and mutual respect are the primary components of unit cohesion. The primary means of creating a positive command climate in a military organization are earn subordinates' trust, maintain discipline, treat subordinates with respect, and have fun.

Education and training, physical fitness, and belief in God are three attributes that enable military leaders to personally overcome adversity during combat operations. The five leadership skills that enable military leaders and their organizations to overcome adversity are winning subordinates' affection, demonstrating character, sharing in the danger, being calm and confident, and keeping subordinates informed.

Demonstrating the character traits of moral courage, honesty, humility, and empathy also fosters resilience in military organizations.

**Results and discussion of research question 2.** Research question two asked: What challenges do military leaders face in implementing those practices employed in overcoming adversity in their organizations? Boermans et al. (2012) previously noted that the military can develop organizational resilience by strengthening internal capacities and environmental resources. The researcher developed this research question with the intent of collecting data that might be beneficial to the development of future training interventions aimed at fostering resilience in military personnel. The first interview question supporting research question two asked what personal challenges the participants of this study faced implementing practices to overcome adversity during combat operations. The results of this study suggest that the two significant causes of adversity during combat operations for military leaders are commander responsibilities and sleep deprivation. Military leaders often refer to their responsibilities as the burden of command. Two specific responsibilities that cause adversity for military leaders during combat operations are decision-making and sending subordinates into harm's way.

Each decision that a person makes involves choosing a future path that is unfamiliar which creates ontological anxiety through fear of uncertainty and the potential for failure (Maddi, 2004). Military leaders are particularly aware of the results that may follow from making a wrong decision on the battlefield. Leaders in the military are responsible not only for their own decisions, but also for the decisions of their subordinates. The battlefield is a chaotic environment where having only limited



information with which to make important decisions is the norm. Nevertheless, military leaders must make tough decisions in a timely manner during combat. Having a competent supporting staff allows more people to participate in the decision-making process which can result in more informed decisions.

Military leaders must be willing to accept casualties to accomplish their missions (Hannah et al., 2009). When military leaders send men into harm's way in combat, casualties are not just possible, they are almost certain. Having to give orders in combat that will result in the death or severe injury of subordinates is a significant cause of adversity for military leaders. Mission accomplishment is the measure that military leaders must use to measure the success of combat operations. Casualties are both expected and accepted as a price for accomplishing the mission.

Military leadership in combat requires an inordinate amount of energy, both physical and mental. The effects of stress and anxiety can sometimes make sleeping difficult. Lack of sleep is certain to negatively impact cognitive performance over time. Declines in cognitive performance will diminish the military leader's decision-making abilities. In addition, military leaders that appear exhausted are likely to cause subordinates to lose confidence in the leader and the organization. Military leaders should be aware of their own physical limitations and pace themselves accordingly. Military leaders must ensure that both they and their subordinates are getting enough rest during combat operations.

The next interview question asked participants how they personally overcame adversity during combat operations. The results of this study suggest that some additional practices used by military leaders to personally overcome adversity during

combat operations include focusing on the mission, not second-guessing decisions, and being with subordinates. The military services train their leaders to put mission accomplishment ahead of all other concerns, including the welfare of their subordinates.

During combat operations, military leaders establish a battle rhythm, or routine, that enables them to stay focused on the mission at hand. Routine and momentum helps military leaders to overcome the adversity that accompanies the responsibility of command. Another practice that enabled military leaders to overcome adversity during combat operations is to not second-guess decisions. Not second-guessing decision, both good and bad, ensures that military leaders do not exasperate the ontological anxiety described previously by Maddi (2004). Military leaders must accept that not all decisions made by them and their subordinates are going to be good. Being with subordinates is another practice that helps military leaders overcome adversity during combat operations. Military leaders draw strength from their subordinates. Getting out of the command post to see the men and women that must withstand the worst of the battle keeps military leaders grounded. The collective martial virtue of a military unit in combat is an inspiration for military leaders.

The next interview question asked the participants what challenges their organizations faced overcoming adversity during combat operations. The results of this study suggest that two additional causes of adversity during combat operations for both military leaders and their subordinates are false expectations and changes in mission. Military personnel must confront the brutality of war. This study suggests that having false expectations about encountering casualties and the requirement for killing are significant causes of adversity during combat operations.

Military personnel must prepare themselves to encounter casualties in combat, both friendly and enemy. Dead and severely wounded soldiers are a necessary part of the battlefield. Wounded or dead civilians are unfortunately sometimes also a part of the battlefield. Military leaders should anticipate that fear levels will rise once a unit starts taking and inflicting casualties. Leaders and their subordinates should also expect that “friendly fire” or other accidents will be the cause of some friendly casualties. Casualties that seem to have been preventable are especially difficult to rationalize and a significant cause of adversity during combat operations.

False expectations about the requirement for killing are also predictable. Killing another person is a significant source of adversity for military personnel during combat operations. Taking human life can change a person forever. After military personnel experience the act of killing, it is the leader’s responsibility to ensure his or her subordinates can make meaning of the killing and maintain their humanity. The accidental killing of civilians is especially difficult for military leaders and their personnel to deal with and a significant cause of adversity during combat operations.

Changing missions are a challenge on the battlefield and potential source of the ambiguity that Bartone (2006) has previously identified as a combat stressor. Military units must react quickly to changing circumstances on the complex battlefield. As a result, military units must embrace new and often unfamiliar tasks to accomplish their new missions. Having to operate disbursed is one example of a change in mission that the participants of this study experienced. Operating disbursed over great distances from other friendly units causes the isolation described by Bartone (2006). When

operating disbursed, junior leaders must take on more responsibility than they are accustomed to.

Having to adapt to new Rules of Engagement (ROE) is another example of a change in mission that the participants of this study experienced. The purpose for ROE is to provide strict guidelines for when and how military personnel can engage the enemy with lethal force. It is common for the ROE to change after meeting certain military and political objectives. For example, after a war zone is turned over to civil authorities, they may permit the local population to carry weapons for self-protection. In this new situation, it becomes more difficult for military personnel now tasked with providing local security to determine friend from foe. This change in mission and the need to adhere to new ROE can be a significant source of adversity for military personnel. Adding to this adversity, scrutiny over whether military personnel have properly followed the ROE sometimes leads to official investigations that often result in serious penalties for convicted violators.

The final interview question supporting research question two asked the participants how *their organizations* overcame adversity during combat operations. The results of this study suggest that some additional practices used by military leaders to help their organizations overcome adversity during combat operations include talking about casualties and killing, keeping the unit moving, and small unit leadership. Talking about casualties allows military personnel to vent their frustrations. Social support and self-disclosure to trusted and empathetic others help to derive meaning from traumatic events. Military leaders should personally spend time with subordinates that have recently experienced casualties and killing for the first time. In doing so, military leaders

may be able to provide some closure by talking about the experience and making meaning with their subordinates.

Military leaders should remind their personnel that the loss of life during war is both expected and worthwhile to accomplish the mission. It is important that military leaders allow their personnel to vent their frustrations accordingly and respectfully after experiencing casualties and killing. Short appropriate memorial services can help facilitate the mourning process. Talking about killing soon thereafter permits military leaders to provide some absolution to personnel that might need it. This is especially important when the conduct of military operations results in the killing of innocent civilians. Keeping the unit moving after experiencing casualties and killing for the first time is another practice that helps to overcome adversity in military organizations. Military leadership, to include the small unit leadership of non-commissioned officers, provides the “purpose, direction, and motivation required to employ...effective and ethical combat power under intense, dynamic, and dangerous conditions” (Hannah, 2012, p. 14). Military leaders must empower small unit leaders. Effective small unit leadership by non-commissioned officers is essential for military organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations.

**Research question 2 summary.** Research question two asked: What challenges do military leaders face implementing those practices employed in overcoming adversity in their organizations? This study suggests that the two significant causes of adversity during combat operations for military leaders are commander responsibilities and sleep deprivation. Decision-making and sending subordinates into harm’s way are examples of commander responsibilities that cause adversity. Military

leadership in combat requires an inordinate amount of energy. The effects of stress and anxiety can sometimes make sleeping difficult. Lack of sleep negatively impacts cognitive performance over time.

Two additional causes of adversity during combat operations for both military leaders and their subordinates are false expectations and changes in mission. Having false expectations about encountering casualties and the requirement for killing are significant causes of adversity. Military units must react quickly to changing circumstances on the complex battlefield. Military units must embrace new and often unfamiliar tasks to accomplish their new missions. Having to operate disbursed is one example of a change in mission that the participants of this study experienced. Having to adapt to new ROE is another example of a change in mission.

Some additional practices used by military leaders to personally overcome adversity include focusing on the mission, not second-guessing decisions, and being with subordinates. Additional practices used by military leaders to help their organizations overcome adversity include talking about casualties and killing, keeping the unit moving, and small unit leadership.

**Results and discussion of research question 3.** Research question three asked: How do military leaders measure their success at overcoming adversity in their organizations? The first interview question asked the participants how they prepared their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations. The intent of this question was to collect data that might be beneficial to the development of future training interventions aimed at fostering resilience in military personnel. Resilience is critical for soldier mission readiness and must be a focus of training (Aude et al., 2014).

As noted by Clausewitz, military personnel and their commanders can counter the negative effects of friction [adversity] through both experience in combat and realistic training for combat (Watts, 2004). The participants of this study have already identified that small unit training to build cohesion is a practice that fosters resilience in military organizations. In response to this interview question, the participants now identified how they conducted that small unit training. The results of this study suggest that military leaders use the following three practices to prepare their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations:

1. Design realistic training that creates adversity.
2. Design training that builds competence and confidence.
3. Manage expectations about war.

Military leaders should design training for their units that is both realistic and creates adversity. Realistic training for combat provides mental hardening against the effects of adversity. The purpose of realistic training is to replicate, as closely as possible, the physical conditions and mental stressors of the combat environment. To that end, the military services have created training environments at stateside military bases that replicate overseas locations. These training environments, complete with actors playing the parts of both enemy combatants and civilians on the battlefield, serve to *immerse* military personnel into the sights, sounds, and smells of the operating environment that they will deploy to.

Realistic training also includes exposing military personnel to controlled risk. Exposing a person to controlled risk, instead of avoiding risk, may improve resilience (Rutter, 2006). Providing opportunities for military personnel to cope with stress and

even fail during training enables a steeling effect that develops toughness in the face of adversity (Seery, 2011). Realistic training that creates adversity allows military personnel to witness and assess their own reactions to stress as well as those of their peers and leaders. Designing realistic training that creates adversity is a practice that fosters resilience in military organizations.

The training programs that military leaders design should also build competence and confidence in their personnel. The goals of individual and unit collective training should become progressively more challenging over time. Military organizations are quintessential learning organizations. Individual and unit competence is essential to success on the battlefield. Collective competence provides individual service men and women with the confidence they need to confront the challenges of combat. Confidence in turn, serves as a pathway to resilience (Luthans et al., 2006). Designing training that builds competence and confidence is a practice that fosters resilience in military organizations.

Clausewitz explained that soldiers on the battlefield will witness “the heart-rending spectacle of the dead and wounded” (Clausewitz, 1976, p. 104). Managing expectations about war includes visualizing a realistic picture in your mind of what the battlefield will look like, sound like, and smell like. Visualization is about moving through the combat environment before getting there. Visualizing close combat and the casualties and killing that come with it before a deployment to combat prevents false expectations. Visualization prepares military personnel to withstand the initial shock of combat. Managing expectations about war is another practice that fosters resilience in military organizations.



The next interview question asked the participants how they assessed their organization's readiness to overcome adversity during combat operations. As the participants in the study pointed out, assessing readiness to overcome adversity is mostly subjective. The results of this study suggest that military leaders primarily use commander's intuition to assess readiness for overcoming adversity in their organizations. When assessing their organization's readiness to overcome adversity, military leaders are looking for the indicators of unit cohesion, positive command climate, and a sense of purpose previously described in this study. Military leaders can use written surveys to assess the individual components of resilience. As noted by the participants of this study, some of them found command climate surveys to be helpful. However, since climate surveys only assess individual perceptions of command climate without assessing unit cohesion or sense of purpose, they are not a good indicator of the unit's overall readiness to overcome adversity in combat.

The military services should make additional options for measuring resilience available to military leaders. For example, the U.S. Army has developed the online GAT to measure psychosocial fitness in the emotional, social, family, spiritual, and physical domains (Lester et al., 2015). However, the Army only releases GAT profiles to individual soldiers and not to unit commanders (Peterson et al., 2011). The Army should consider compiling a collective unit GAT score for unit commanders to use as a tool to assess readiness for overcoming adversity in their organizations. The other military services should consider using the GAT to measure resilience as well.

The next interview question asked the participants how they measured their organizations' success at overcoming adversity during combat operations. The

participants in this study pointed out that overcoming adversity and getting past the first five days of combat are critical. The results of this study suggest that staying calm under fire and not descending into self-pity are the metrics that military leaders can use to measure their organizations' success at overcoming adversity, particularly during those first five days. As noted previously in this study, military leaders can prepare their subordinates to stay calm under fire by designing realistic training that creates adversity, designing training that builds competence and confidence, and managing expectations about war. Military leaders can prepare their subordinates not to descend into self-pity by employing small unit training to build cohesion, creating a positive command climate, and instilling a sense of purpose.

**Research question 3 summary.** Research question 3 asked: How do military leaders measure their success at overcoming adversity in their organizations? Design realistic training that creates adversity, design training that builds competence and confidence, and managing expectations about war are three practices that military leaders use to prepare their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations. Realistic training for combat provides mental hardening against the effects of adversity. The training programs that military leaders design should also build competence and confidence in their personnel. The goals of individual and unit collective training should become progressively more challenging over time. Collective competence provides individual service men and women with the confidence they need to confront the challenges of combat. Visualization is about creating a realistic picture in your mind of what the battlefield will look like, sound like, and smell like. Visualization prepares military personnel to withstand the initial shock of combat.

Assessing readiness to overcome adversity is mostly subjective. Military leaders primarily use commander's intuition to assess readiness for overcoming adversity. When assessing their organization's readiness to overcome adversity, military leaders are looking for indicators of unit cohesion, positive command climate, and a sense of purpose. Military leaders can also use written surveys to assess the individual components of resilience. Staying calm under fire and not descending into self-pity are the metrics that military leaders can use to measure their organizations' success at overcoming adversity during combat.

**Results and discussion of research question 4.** Research question 4 asked: What recommendations would military leaders make to aspiring leaders wanting to overcome adversity in their organizations in the future? The first interview question asked the participants what they learned from their experience overcoming adversity during combat operations that they wished they had known prior to their combat deployments. The participants in this study explained that most of the personnel that they took to war were quite able to overcome the adversity of combat. They also admitted that a few of their personnel were unable to overcome combat related adversity. A summary of their recommendations for future leaders follows.

The military services might consider screening applicants prior to enlistment or commissioning for those character traits that might negatively influence a person's ability to overcome stress during combat operations. Studies have shown that character traits such as neuroticism, cynicism, and emotional exhaustion correlate negatively to resilience and hardiness (Lo Bue et al., 2013; Skomorovsky & Stevens, 2013). Studies have also shown that hardiness and resilience are predictors of success during military

training (Bartone et al., 2008; Bartone et al., 2013; Hystad et al., 2011; Johnsen et al., 2013). Hardiness and resilience levels in new military recruits will obviously vary. Some people will be more resilient because of youthful experiences. Some people will encounter “problems” during their youth that will either result in PTSD at the time or potentially predispose them for PTSD later in life.

The military services should consider reviewing and strengthening any policies and procedures that allow for the identification of personnel susceptible to stress during entry-level basic training for new recruits. Military boot camps are well known for introducing new recruits to tough and realistic training and the inevitable stress that comes with it. The imagination of drill instructors is almost limitless when it comes to “stressing out” new recruits to test their mettle. If identified early during boot camp training, the military services should have the option to separate those personnel that are more susceptible to stress. The military services should facilitate this same screening process in units conducting pre-deployment combat training. If leaders identify “stress-susceptible” personnel during pre-deployment combat training with their units, the military should provide additional training to these service members or assign them to units not likely to engage in direct combat.

Based on their life experiences, some people are going to be more resilient than others (Rutter, 2006; Seely, 2011). Military leaders face the challenge of monitoring personnel for the negative effects of stress during the combat deployment. Complicating this task, this study has shown that experienced personnel will sometimes refuse to admit that they are having problems at all with stress. Just like professional athletes, military personnel will sometimes insist on playing hurt. To be effective at identifying

personnel that are having difficulties with stress, military leaders must work closely with their supporting medical personnel to properly identify developing stress issues.

Once returned from combat, the military services should seek to keep combat units together for as long as possible. Current military personnel manning policies necessitate the transfers of large numbers of personnel, particularly key leaders, to other units and assignments following a combat deployment. The commanders interviewed for this study consistently referred to this practice as “breaking up the units”. Previous research has shown that social support is a key enabler for the recognition, prevention, and care of stress (Cacioppo et al., 2011). Social support continues as a factor that influences resilience after military personnel return from deployments (Eisen et al., 2014).

Just as building unit cohesion prior to a combat deployment fosters resilience in military personnel, maintaining unit cohesion after a combat deployment continues to foster resilience in those same personnel. Military personnel come to know and trust their comrades in a combat unit and they take care of each other. Cohesive units will band together to help take care of those experiencing issues with stress after a deployment. According to the participants of this study, in the waning years of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Marine Corps did initiate a policy of keeping personnel in their combat units three months after returning from deployment. The other military services should take note of this lesson learned by the Marine Corps. More importantly, the military services should not forget this lesson when the next war starts.

The participants in this study indicated that service members are reluctant to ask for help with combat related stress issues. Military leaders must also keep in mind that

traumatic brain injury and other issues to include alcohol and prescription drug abuse often confound combat related stress issues. The military services must provide its leaders with training on how to recognize the signs and symptoms of these complicated mental health problems. Relying on service member to self-report issues with stress is not realistic and most certainly leads to unattended problems.

Providing opportunities for military personnel to talk about their combat experience is imperative for the process of making meaning out of war. Talking about those experiences with others that have also “been there” seems to make sense. In this regard, discharged veterans may be quite helpful to active duty personnel and the military services should look for ways to engage their active duty personnel with the veteran community. Providing post-deployment mental health services to families is a responsibility that the military services must embrace. Family members also endure stress because of their loved-one’s wartime deployments and experiences. Helping family members is pragmatic because it also helps the service member.

Transitioning completely out of the military service exasperates the loss of unit cohesion for those personnel returning to civilian life. As noted in the study, it was not unusual for the military to discharge a service member from active duty within 30 days of returning from a combat deployment. PTSD might manifest in those individuals that have recently lost the organizational support that they had previously relied on to remain resilient. In the recent war, veterans returned to civilian communities that were relatively or even completely “untouched” by the war. It is reasonable to say that the expression “thank you for your service” has become cliché and carries less meaning that it did at

the start of the recent long wars. The military services should prepare veterans to deal with the feelings of alienation or isolation that may result when they leave the military.

Veterans organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion may be able to replace some of the organizational support that service members lose when they leave active duty. Although mostly filled with older veterans from America's previous wars, these veterans' organizations should look for opportunities bring the new generation of post-911 veterans into their fold. In addition to brick-and-mortar organizations, several online veterans' organizations have appeared in recent years. These organizations, while popular with tech-savvy younger veterans, cannot provide the face-to-face support that service members are accustomed to.

The final interview question asked the participants what recommendations they would make to aspiring military leaders wanting to prepare their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations. The participants uniformly recommended that aspiring commanders implement the practices for fostering resilience identified by interview question one. Those practices include: small unit training to build unit cohesion, creating a positive command climate, and instilling a sense of purpose prior to deploying to combat. The participants also recommended the leadership skills and practices identified by interview question three which include: winning subordinates' affection, demonstrating character, sharing in the danger, being calm and confident, and keeping subordinates informed.

**Research question 4 summary.** Research question 4 asked: What recommendations would military leaders make to aspiring leaders wanting to overcome adversity in their organizations in the future? The military services might consider

screening applicants prior to enlistment or commissioning for those character traits that might negatively influence a person's ability to overcome stress during combat operations. The military services should have the option to separate those personnel that are more susceptible to stress. The military services should facilitate this same screening process in units conducting pre-deployment combat training.

Military leaders face the challenge of monitoring personnel for the negative effects of stress during the combat deployment. Military leaders must work closely with their supporting medical personnel to properly identify developing stress issues. Once returned from combat, the military services should seek to keep combat units together for as long as possible. Maintaining unit cohesion after a combat deployment continues to foster resilience in those same personnel. Service members are reluctant to ask for help with combat related stress issues. The military services must provide its leaders with training on how to recognize the signs and symptoms of stress. Providing opportunities for military personnel to talk about their combat experience is imperative for the process of making meaning. Providing post-deployment mental health services to families is a responsibility that the military services must embrace.

Transitioning completely out of the military service exasperates the loss of unit cohesion for those personnel returning to civilian life. The military services should prepare veterans to deal with the feelings of alienation or isolation that may result when they leave the military. Veterans organizations such as the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion may be able to replace some of the organizational support that service members lose when they leave active duty. The online veterans'



organizations have appeared in recent years cannot provide the face-to-face support that service members are accustomed to.

### **Key Findings**

Many of the findings from this research study are new and add to the existing body of knowledge on military resilience. Those key findings that add to the literature are:

- The three personal attributes that enable military leaders to overcome adversity during combat operations are educated and trained, physically fit, and belief in God.
- The primary practice employed to build cohesion in military organizations is *small unit* training specifically.
- Trust and mutual respect are the primary components of unit cohesion and the enablers of teamwork in military organizations.
- Instilling a sense of purpose is one of three organizational factors that influences resilience in military organizations. The other two are small unit training to build cohesion and creating a positive command climate.
- The four primary components of creating a positive command climate in military organizations are earn their trust, maintain discipline, treat subordinates with respect, and have fun.
- The leadership practices that foster resilience in military organizations are winning subordinates' affection, demonstrating character, sharing in the danger, being calm and confident, and keeping subordinates informed.
- The primary components of demonstrating character in military organizations are moral courage, humility, honesty, and empathy.

## **Implications of the Study**

When military personnel face a demanding event such as combat, they go through an appraisal and coping process (Britt, Sinclair et al., 2013). Both personal and organizational factors influence this appraisal and coping process (Boermans et al., 2012; Britt, Sinclair et al., 2013). Examples of individual factors that can encourage resilience in the military include “positive coping, positive affect, positive thinking, realism, behavioral control, physical fitness, and altruism” (Meredith et al., 2011, p. 16). Examples of organizational factors that can support resilience include positive command climate, morale, teamwork, unit cohesion, and other social facets (Boermans et al., 2012; Britt & Oliver, 2013; Meredith et al., 2011).

Past research has also described resilience variables as being either a risk factor or a protective factor (Lee et al., 2013). Examples of risk factors include anxiety, depression, and perceived stress. Examples of protective factors include optimism, social support, and self-efficacy. Protective factors have shown the largest correlation with resilience and therefore indicate that resilience improves more effectively by enhancing protective factors than reducing risk factors (Lee et al., 2013). This leader practices for fostering resilience identified in this study are both organizational and protective.

If military leaders employ the practices for fostering resilience identified in this study, then their subordinates may be able to cope more effectively with the stressful experience of combat. In addition, by enabling military personnel to better overcome adversity, active duty service members and veterans might exhibit fewer mental health problems because of their experiences in war. To these ends, the military services

could use these findings to improve their institutional leader training programs for both enlisted personnel and officers. The military services might also take into consideration a leader's level of personal resilience as a criterion for assignment to combat units or promotion to greater positions of responsibility. The military services could measure levels of personal resilience in using the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003) or the U.S. Army's Global Assessment Tool (Peterson et al., 2011).

The ability of military leaders to foster resilience in their organizations may also impact operational readiness and combat effectiveness. If military leaders can increase the capacity of their organizations to overcome adversity during combat, then the likelihood of success on the battlefield may also increase. The military services might use these findings to improve their existing pre-deployment training programs or develop new training programs for military units deploying to combat.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study of military resilience also has implications for leadership studies in general and change leadership specifically. Diane Coutu (2002), writing for *Harvard Business Review*, brought the idea of resilience to the attention of professionals outside of the mental health community. Coutu's review of resilience theories identified three common characteristics of resilient people. Resilient people accept reality; resilient people believe that life has meaning; and resilient people can adapt and improvise in response to change. Warren Bennis (2007) concluded that, "adaptive capacity or resilience is the single most important quality in a leader or in anyone else for that matter who hopes to lead a healthy, meaningful life" (p. 5).

As noted by (McManus et al., 2008), translating the concept of resilience into a

working construct for organizations is complicated. Organizational resilience is new to management thinking (McAslan, 2010) and the concept of organizational resilience has remained mostly ambiguous and undefined (Burnard & Bhamra, 2011). Friery (2012) suggested that since gradual exposure to adversity enables individuals to develop coping skills, regular exposure to adversity for organizations may enable the development of coping skills at the organizational level. As we know from the preceding study, resilience manifests behaviorally as “recovering quickly from setbacks, shock, injuries, adversity, and stress while maintaining a mission and organizational focus” (Aude et al., 2014, p. 47). It would be reasonable to describe organizational change as being about *setbacks, shock, injuries, adversity, and stress. Maintaining a mission and organizational focus* is certainly a goal during a change initiative. Luthans (2002b) described resiliency as the “positive psychological capacity to rebound, to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure or even positive change, progress, and increased responsibility” (p. 702). The goals of any change initiative are likely to include *positive change, progress, and increased responsibility*.

If we can discern how military leaders foster resilience in their organizations, then we may be able to determine how the leaders of other types of organizations might be able to foster resilience as well. With minor modifications, the taxonomy of leader practice for fostering resilience described above may be of use to leaders in many types of organizations. A recommendation for future research is to determine if a leader’s ability to foster resilience in an organization contributes either directly or indirectly to the leader’s ability to lead change in an organization. The results of this study could serve as a starting point for applying what we know about overcoming adversity in military

organizations to other types of organizations.

### **Final Thoughts**

It may be surprising to those who have not served in the military that despite exposure to traumatic events, most military personnel do not develop mental health problems after experiencing the trauma of combat (Bonanno et al., 2012; Hystad et al., 2015; Seligman & Fowler, 2011; Sinclair et al., 2013). Certainly then, military leaders must be doing an excellent job of fostering resilience in their organizations. This research sought to figure out how they are doing exactly that. In doing so, I took a positive psychology approach to determining the *how* of fostering resilience. As explained earlier, positive psychology focuses on positive experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). As explained by Luthans (2002b), positive psychology aims to “shift the emphasis away from what is wrong with people to what is right with people” (p. 697). This approach worked quite well for the purposes of this study. Military leaders are fostering resilience in their organizations. Of course, they can always do better and this study is an attempt to help future leaders do just that.

Will this study be in vain? Mancini and Bonanno (2009) expressed doubts as to whether resilience-building interventions are effective, because according to them, the predictors of resilience are mostly stable and therefore not easily changed. I disagree wholeheartedly. Military leaders can and do foster resilience in their subordinates. How is this possible? Consider the work of Zaccaro (2007). He proposed a model of traits and leadership that categorized leader attributes as being either distal or proximal. The less malleable distal attributes are cognitive abilities, personality, motives, and values.

Resilience would fall into this category. On the other hand, proximal attributes include social appraisal skills, problem-solving skills, experience, and tacit knowledge. Leader training programs usually seek to influence proximal attributes because they are easier to change and therefore more disposed to intervention.

However, as Zaccaro (2007) points out, some long-term systematic interventions, like those found in military training programs, can positively affect the development of distal attributes as well. The training programs described by the military commanders that participated in this study were long-term and systematic. They designed their training programs specifically to build confidence, competence, and most importantly, unit cohesion. All three of these goals support the fostering of resilience in military organizations. The results of this study show that resilience is a trait that is amenable to long-term and systemic intervention.

Some have surmised that the idea of teaching resilience skills might “lead some people to overestimate their own coping ability or to underestimate the level of distress they might experience in response to a potential psychological hazard such as combat” (Bonanno et al., 2011, p. 527). This may be true, but does it really matter? I suppose the implication is that if people overestimated their own ability to overcome adversity, they might inadvertently take on more stress than they can handle in combat. My experience in combat is that military personnel do not get a choice in how much adversity they take on. Combat serves up stress at every corner. Military personnel do not have the option to pass on their fair share.

Military leaders understand that combat is stressful and potentially traumatic. Moreover, they recognize their responsibility to foster resilience in their organizations.

Fostering resilience in subordinates is transformational leadership at its best. The practices for fostering resilience identified in this study are the vehicles for the idealized influence, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration that Bass (1999) refers to in his explanation of how leaders move both themselves and their followers beyond self-interest.

My research on overcoming adversity in military organizations has opened my eyes to see just how transformational most military leaders are. Indeed, the military services are quintessential examples of transformational organizations. According to Bass (1999), transformational organizations establish policies and practices that empower employees and encourage morale. Transformational organizations provide meaning to their employees' lives and work. As a result, employees come into alignment with the leader and the organization. This alignment promotes collective efficacy and effectiveness in the organization (Bass, 1999). This describes every military organization that I served in over twenty years.

The transformational leaders that I worked for helped me to land in the category of more than 90% of military personnel who experienced the trauma of close combat but did not develop chronic post-traumatic stress. I am proud to say that the transformational leadership that I provided to others served most of them well. For those that I served with that are still struggling to cope with the trauma of combat stress, I wish you all the blessings that you surely deserve and pray that you let God help you cope with, and hopefully overcome the adversity that has left its mark on you.

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## APPENDIX A

## IRB Exception Notice



Pepperdine University  
24255 Pacific Coast Highway  
Malibu, CA 90263  
TEL: 310-506-4000

## NOTICE OF APPROVAL FOR HUMAN RESEARCH

Date: July 14, 2016

Protocol Investigator Name: Eugene Coughlin

Protocol #: 16-06-298

Project Title: FOSTERING RESILIENCE: LEADER STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES FOR OVERCOMING ADVERSITY IN MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS

School: Graduate School of Education and Psychology

Dear Eugene Coughlin:

Thank you for submitting your application for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We appreciate the work you have done on your proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations: 45 CFR 46.101 that govern the protections of human subjects.

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit an amendment to the IRB. Since your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite the best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete written explanation of the event and your written response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the IRB and documenting the adverse event can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* at [community.pepperdine.edu/irb](http://community.pepperdine.edu/irb).

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all communication or correspondence related to your application and this approval. Should you have additional questions or require clarification of the contents of this letter, please contact the IRB Office. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Judy Ho, Ph.D., IRB Chairperson

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives

## APPENDIX B

## Invitation to Participate in the Study

Dear (Participant name),

I would like to invite you to participate in a voluntary study in association with the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership (EDOL) program at Pepperdine University's Graduate School of Education and Psychology. The purpose of this research study is to identify leadership strategies and practices for overcoming adversity in military organizations. Your participation in the study is voluntary and confidentiality will be maintained to your satisfaction. Participation entails a no longer than 60 minute interview. Interview questions and an informed consent form are attached. Please review this in advance of the interview. Your participation in this study will be extremely valuable to new and current military leaders, as well as other scholars and practitioners in the field.

Please respond to this message if you are willing to be interviewed as part of this study.

## APPENDIX C

## Informed Consent

**PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY**  
*Graduate School of Education and Psychology*

**INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES****FOSTERING RESILIENCE: LEADER STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES FOR  
OVERCOMING ADVERSITY IN MILITARY ORGANIZATIONS**

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted Mr. Gene Coughlin, a doctoral student at Pepperdine University. You were carefully selected because of your classification as a former Marine Corps officer that commanded an infantry battalion in a war zone in Iraq or Afghanistan between 2003 and 2014. Your participation is voluntary. You should read the information below, and ask questions about anything that you do not understand, before deciding whether to participate. Please take as much time as you need to read the consent form. You may also decide to discuss participation with your family or friends. You will be given a copy of this form for you records.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this research study was to identify leadership strategies and practices for overcoming adversity in military organizations. This entailed determining what challenges military leaders face in implementing practices employed in overcoming adversity in their organizations. Also examined was how military leaders measure success at overcoming adversity in their organizations. Finally, this study considered what recommendations military leaders would make to aspiring leaders wanting to overcome adversity in their organizations in the future.

**STUDY PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an approximately 60-minute interview.

The following interview protocol will be used:

### **Interview Protocol**

Ice breaker: Tell me a little about your career

Question 1: What current practices did you employ to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?

Question 2: What personal attributes enabled you to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?

Question 3: What leadership skills enabled you to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?

Question 4: What personal challenges did you face implementing practices to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?

Question 5: How did you overcome those personal challenges during combat operations?

Question 6: What challenges did your organization face overcoming adversity during combat operations?

Question 7: How did your organization overcome those challenges during combat operations?

Question 8: How did you prepare your organization to overcome adversity during combat operations?

Question 9: How did you assess your organizations readiness to overcome adversity during combat operations?

Question 10: How did you measure your organization's success at overcoming adversity during combat operations?

Question 11: Is there anything that you have learned from your experience in overcoming adversity that you wish you knew prior to your organization's deployment for combat operations?

Question 12: How would you recommend that aspiring military leaders prepare their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations?

## **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Potential risks may include the following: feeling uncomfortable with certain questions, fatigue, and boredom. Another risk to study participants was the potential disclosure of privileged internal policies and procedures belonging to the military organizations in which they served.

## **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

While there are no direct benefits to the study participants, the practical benefits to society includes:

1. The practical importance of this study is that finding protective factors, such as leader practices and strategies for overcoming adversity, may help military personnel cope with the stressful experiences of combat.
2. The conclusions of this study may be useful for improving leader selection and development programs in the military.
3. Developing an understanding how military leaders foster resilience in their organizations could be of substantial value for civilian organizations such as fire or police departments.
4. This contextual study of military leader strategies and practices may also provide a more thorough understanding of leadership in general.

In addition, upon your request, a completed copy of this study will be provided to you.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

I will keep your records for this study confidential as far as permitted by law. Your responses will be coded with a pseudonym and transcription data will be maintained separately. However, if I am required to do so by law, I may be required to disclose information collected about you. Examples of the types of issues that would require me to break confidentiality are if you tell me about instances of child abuse and elder abuse. Pepperdine's University's Human Subjects Protection Program (HSPP) may also access the data collected. The HSPP occasionally reviews and monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research subjects.

The interview audio-tapes and notes will be destroyed one week after the final defense of the dissertation before the candidate's faculty doctoral committee. The data will be stored on the hard drive of a password-protected computer in the candidate's place of residence. A backup copy of the data will be stored on the candidate's password-protected Carbonite cloud-based data storage service. The data will be stored for a minimum of three years. Any identifiable information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential.

**PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

**ALTERNATIVES TO FULL PARTICIPATION**

The alternative to participation in the study is not participating or completing only the items which you feel comfortable. Should you chose this alternative, your relationship with your employer will not be affected whether you participate or not in this study.

**EMERGENCY CARE AND COMPENSATION FOR INJURY**

If you are injured as a direct result of research procedures you will receive medical treatment; however, you or your insurance will be responsible for the cost. Pepperdine University does not provide any monetary compensation for injury

**INVESTIGATOR'S CONTACT INFORMATION**

I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Mr. Gene Coughlin at [eugene.coughlin@pepperdine.edu](mailto:eugene.coughlin@pepperdine.edu) if I have any other questions or concerns about this research. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional School Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB) at Pepperdine University, via email at [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu) or at 310-568-5753.

**RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant or research in general please contact Dr. Judy Ho, Chairperson of the Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University 6100 Center Drive Suite 500, Los Angeles, CA 90045, 310-568-5753 or [gpsirb@pepperdine.edu](mailto:gpsirb@pepperdine.edu).

## APPENDIX D

## Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
RQ1: What current practices did you employ to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organizations?	<p>IQ1: What practices did you employ to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?</p> <p>IQ2: What personal attributes enabled you to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?</p> <p>IQ3: What leadership skills enabled you to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?</p>
RQ2: What challenges do military leaders face in implementing those practices employed in overcoming adversity in their organizations?	<p>IQ4: What personal challenges did you face implementing practices to overcome adversity during combat operations in your military organization?</p> <p>IQ5: How did you overcome those personal challenges during combat operations?</p> <p>IQ6: What challenges did your organization face overcoming adversity during combat operations?</p> <p>IQ7: How did your organization overcome those challenges during combat operations?</p>
RQ3: How do military leaders measure their success at overcoming adversity in their organizations?	<p>IQ8: How did you prepare your organization to overcome adversity during combat operations?</p> <p>IQ9: How did you assess your organization readiness to overcome adversity during combat operations?</p> <p>IQ10: How did you measure your organization's success at overcoming diversity during combat operations?</p>
RQ4: What recommendations would military leaders make to aspiring leaders wanting to overcome adversity in their organizations in the future?	<p>IQ11: Is there anything that you have learned from your experience in overcoming adversity that you wish you knew prior to your organization's deployment for combat operations?</p> <p>IQ12: How would you recommend that aspiring military leaders prepare their organizations to overcome adversity during combat operations?</p>

## APPENDIX E

## Practices That Foster a Culture of Resilience in a Military Organization

<b>Three Foundational Practices for Fostering Resilience in Military Organizations</b>
<b>Build cohesion by conducting small unit training</b> Cohesion is about trust and mutual respect among peers
<b>Create a positive command climate</b> Earn trust, enforce discipline, show respect, and have fun
<b>Instill a sense of purpose</b> Purpose answers the question “what are we fighting for and why”
<b>Five Pre-deployment Practices for Fostering Resilience in Military Organizations</b>
<b>Demonstrate character to subordinates</b> Demonstrate moral courage, humility, empathy, and honesty
<b>Win the affection of subordinates</b> Show concern and build personal relationships
<b>Design training that builds competence and confidence</b> Functional training makes people better at their job
<b>Provide realistic training that creates adversity</b> Scenario-based training prepares people for the operating environment
<b>Manage expectations about war</b> Visualize the worst-case scenarios and get mentally prepared for them
<b>Eight Deployment Practices for Fostering Resilience in Military Organizations</b>
<b>Share in the danger with subordinates</b> Identify the friction points and be there alongside your people
<b>Be calm and confident on the battlefield</b> Always be the experienced professional, do not get emotional
<b>Focus on the mission</b> Do not lose sight of the task at hand or the final objective, do not become distracted
<b>Do not second-guess decisions</b> Both you and your subordinates are going to make some bad decisions
<b>Talk about the casualties and killing</b> Bad things will happen, talk about them when they do
<b>Keep the unit moving after casualties and killing</b> Determine the next action and start working on it, maintain momentum
<b>Keep subordinates informed</b> Information prevents fear of the unknown, get face-to-face with your people and talk
<b>Empower small unit leaders</b> Demand leadership from everyone up and down the chain of command